Modern Times in Southeast Asia, 1920s–1970s

Edited by
Susie Protschky
and
Tom van den Berge

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Notes on Contributors

Timothy P. Barnard

Timothy P. Barnard is Associate Professor in the Department of History at the National University of Singapore, where he specializes in the environmental and cultural history of island Southeast Asia. His research has focused on a range of topics including state formation in the eighteenth-century Straits of Melaka, Malay identity throughout history, Malay film in the 1950s, and the environmental history of Singapore. His publications include the book *Multiple centres of authority* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003) and the edited volumes *Contesting Malayness* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2004) and *Nature contained* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2014). He has just finished writing a book on the history of the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Contact Timothy at histpb@nus.edu.sg

Tom van den Berge

Tom van den Berge is Senior Researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden (KITLV), where he is currently working in the 'Decolonization, Violence and War in Indonesia, 1945–1950' research programme. He is also working on a biography of I.S. Kijne (1899–1970), a Dutch missionary in New Guinea. He holds a PhD from Leiden University. His main field of academic interest includes the relations between religion, mission and empire building, and between politics, good governance and intelligence services in colonial Indonesia. He is the author of *H.J. van Mook 1894–1965: Een vrij en gelukkig Indonesië* (Bussum: THOTH, 2014).

Marieke Bloembergen

Marieke Bloembergen is a cultural historian, specialized in colonial and postcolonial history, in particular of Indonesia. Her research interests include the political dynamics of knowledge production in (post-)colonial Indonesia, and biographies, histories and memories of (post-)colonial policing in a widening, inter-Asian and global context. She works as Senior Researcher at the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies in Leiden (KITLV).

Janit Feangfu

Janit Feangfu is Lecturer in Thai Literature in the Faculty of Humanities at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. She completed her PhD in the Department of Southeast Asia at SOAS, University of London on the construction of modern Thai identities in Thai literature during the Cold War Era. She was awarded

Harvard-Yenching Institute Doctoral Scholarship (2006–2010) and M.L. Bunleua Theppayasuwan Literary Criticism Award in 2005. Her research interests include modern Thai literature, issues of identity and gender, rural and urban discourse and Thai cultural Studies. She is the author of "Orientalisation from within and consuming the modern world: Rural-urban contact in Thai popular literature of the 1970s", in: Rachel Harrison (ed.), *Disturbing conventions: Decentering Thai literary cultures*, pp. 111–35 (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2014).

Christina Firpo

Christina Firpo earned a PhD in Southeast Asian History from the University of California, Los Angeles. She is currently Associate Professor of Southeast Asian History at California Polytechnic State University. Her book, *The uprooted: Race, childhood, and imperialism in Vietnam, 1890–1980*, was published by the University of Hawai'i Press in 2016. She is currently working on her second book, *Negotiated affections: The informal economy of clandestine prostitution in Vietnam* (*1920–1954*).

Rachel V. Harrison

Rachel V. Harrison is Professor of Thai Cultural Studies at SOAS, University of London. She has published widely on issues of gender, and sexuality, modern literature and cinema in Thailand as well as the comparative literature of Southeast Asia. In addition to her co-edited volume (with Peter A. Jackson) on *The ambiguous allure of the West* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010), she has edited a volume of chapters by Thai authors on the question of Western theoretical approaches to Thai literary analysis, entitled *Disturbing conventions: Decentering Thai literary cultures* (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2014). She is currently working on a research project in culture and public health relating to cancer in Northeast Thailand and is editor of the quarterly journal *Southeast Asia Research*.

Chie Ikeya

Chie Ikeya is Associate Professor in the Department of History at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. Ikeya received her PhD in modern Southeast Asian history from Cornell University and researches in the related fields of Asian history/studies, women's and gender history, race, gender and sexuality studies, and postcolonial studies. She is the author of *Refiguring women, colonialism, and modernity in Burma* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011). Contact Chie at chie.ikeya@rutgers.edu

Julian Millie

Julian Millie is Senior Lecturer and ARC Future Fellow in the anthropology programme at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia). His current research focuses on Islamic preaching and its relevance and meanings for Indonesia's public sphere(s). Since obtaining his PhD at Leiden University (the Netherlands) he has carried out a number of research projects on Islamic ritual, media and commemoration, with special attention to the Sundanese ethnic group of West Java. His most recent book is *Splashed by the saint: Ritual reading and Islamic sanctity in West Java* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2009), and his most recent article is "Regional aspects of the Indonesian Ulama Council's ideological turn", *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 16(3), 2015, pp. 260–81. Contact Julian at Julian.Millie@Monash.edu

Michael D. Pante

Michael D. Pante is an instructor in the Department of History, Ateneo de Manila University. He is also the associate editor of *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints*. He is currently a PhD Area Studies candidate at the Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University. His dissertation is about the history of Quezon City. His research interests are urban studies, transport history, and historiography. His most recent publications have appeared in *Asian Studies Review*, *Journal of Social History*, *Kritika Kultura*, and *International Review of Social History*.

Susie Protschky

Susie Protschky is Senior Lecturer in History at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia). She is a cultural historian of modern Dutch colonialism, with a particular focus on Indonesia. Susie is the author of *Images of the tropics: Environment and visual culture in colonial Indonesia* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2011) and *Photographic subjects: Monarchy, photography and the Dutch East Indies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, under contract), and editor of *Photography, modernity and the governed in late-colonial Indonesia* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015). Contact Susie at susanne.protschky@monash.edu

CHAPTER 1

Modern Times in Southeast Asia, 1920s–1970s

Susie Protschky

Modern Times in Southeast Asia interrogates how Southeast Asians conceived of modernity at certain places and in particular times of transition from colonial to post-colonial regimes across the twentieth century. The essays in this volume take cross-sections of space and time, looking into and out onto the world from Southeast Asia at moments between the 1920s and the 1970s. This approach involves examining samples of plural modernities whose longer seams, reaching into the present and embedded in deeper pasts, will take the work of many scholars to unravel. We are not, then, concerned with periodizing modernity's ostensive advent, which the historiography conventionally locates around the time of European colonial expansion in the region.[1] Rather, we aim to follow how Southeast Asians articulated notions and experiences of modernity once it had *already* ostensibly commenced and was established—or, indeed, proliferating.

Although by no means comprehensive of the region, this volume surveys a wider range of Southeast Asian case studies than most, covering the Philippines, Myanmar, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and by scholars working in the disciplines of history, anthropology, literary and cultural studies. The essays here examine spheres of life where 'being modern' was claimed in public and private domains: at sites of popular consumption (the cinema) and high culture (the art gallery), in the city, the government office, at the place of worship, on the written page, in the bedroom, and through the body. We investigate how 'modern times' were understood and instrumentalized by film-makers for audiences in Malaya and Singapore, art critics for exhibition-goers in Indonesia, town planners for residents in the Philippines, guardians for *métis* boys in a Vietnamese orphanage, a sexologist in Myanmar, novelists in Thailand, and Muslim and theosophical leaders in Indonesia. The authors of this volume focus on sources and subjects that provide access to what Harry Harootunian identified as the essential terrain of modernity—the "everyday": "the streets, the buildings, the new institutions and constant

1 See, for example, Andaya and Andaya 1995; Andaya 1997.

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movement, the ceaseless interrelationship between public and private that registers large and small events alike".[2]

Our emphasis on Southeast Asians' experiences or perceptions of modernity engages with the difficulty of practically distinguishing between the *conditions* of modernity and its *representations*.[3] Scholars have been divided over, and sometimes conflate, whether modernity is a status with certain constituent parts that emerge in a particular order—capitalism, industrialization, urbanization, democratization—or whether it is chiefly a construct for making sense of time, change and difference.[4] If the latter, then should we not confine ourselves to naming those notional components of change, rather than gesture at some ideal state that has rarely, if ever, manifested as the model predicts? In *Modern Times in Southeast Asia*, we take care to distinguish between how we, as scholars, discuss modernity as an historical condition, and how historical actors in the twentieth century understood and instrumentalized the term. We are interested, in other words, in attending to what Frederick Cooper describes as "the story of the 'it'—without necessarily accepting the tangibility of the it".[5] In doing so, we also respond to Dipesh Chakrabarty's observation that

> claims to modernity, in any age, are artifacts of both ideology and imagination. To be 'modern' is to judge one's experience of time and space and thus create new possibilities for oneself.[6]

Our subjective and quotidian concerns are local, but attending equally to Southeast Asia's global connections in the twentieth century enables us to conceive modern times as "lateral and simultaneous, not evolutionary or stagist".[7] Indeed, Asia scholars have been instrumental in articulating how global connections constituted local modernities.[8] The notion that Southeast Asians were faced, in the colonial period, with a choice between either a Euro/American colonial programme of modernization or an Indigenous/nationalist alternative turns out not to be the whole story. Historians have lately mounted a challenge to the teleology of a failed colonial project of modernity that is

2 Harootunian 2000:19.

3 Following Cooper 2005:114; and Chakrabarty 2011:671 (note that Chakrabarty uses 'modernization' and 'modernity' as cognates for 'conditions' and 'representations').

4 Cooper refers to the 'condition' formula as 'capitalism plus' in Cooper 2005:125.

5 Cooper 2005:126.

6 Chakrabarty 2011:674.

7 Modern Girl Around the World Research Group 2008:4.

8 See, for example, Barlow 1991; Gomes 1994; Tanabe and Tokita-Tanabe 2003; Harrison and Jackson 2009; Ikeya 2011; Dodson and Hatcher 2012; Gottowik 2014b; Lewis 2016.

inevitably usurped and reshaped under a nationalist banner. Agus Suwignyo and Bart Luttikhuis, for example, have shown that visions of a modern future diverged from the programme of elites in late-colonial Indonesia, but that many workers and students were nonetheless invested in the social mobility afforded to them and their families through supporting the political status quo.[9] Su Lin Lewis' study of Penang, Rangoon and Bangkok as 'cities in motion' between the 1920s and 1940s similarly reveals "a social history of an aspirational multi-ethnic group of urban professionals and their children who moved and thrived" among and with colonial elites rather than in ideological opposition to them, and who were cosmopolitan in their tastes and influences.[10] Pamela Pattynama, Henk Schulte Nordholt and Karen Strassler have demonstrated that a plural orientation—towards America and China, for example, not just Europe—encountered in everyday life through art, consumer goods and popular culture, not only offered Indonesians *access* to modernity, it made them *already* modern, by their own definitions.[11] Together, these studies confirm Chakrabarty's contention that "[o]ne's sense of being modern did not always follow the chronology of modernization".[12]

This scholarship has important implications for how Southeast Asianists might revise our understandings of modernity in the region, but its chronological range has thus far been confined to the colonial period. In treating ideas about and experiences of modernity as devices for scoping into moments across the colonial and post-colonial periods, from the 1920s to the 1970s, *Modern Times* queries the nature and extent of historical (dis)continuities in the wake of regime change and revolution. In doing so, we query the determinants of historical change across the colonial and post-colonial periods. Can one be 'modern', as one historian has recently posited, without access to power? Are greater individual agency and social mobility the inevitable end-goals of becoming modern?[13] What is the role of "horizons of expectation", or "how historical subjects imagined their futures", in defining modern times?[14] Indeed, debates about modernity often turn on how to account for the political, economic and social agency of a majority without full citizenship, in the sense of a universal franchise and equality before the law.

9 Suwignyo 2012, 2014:126–7, 143; Luttikhuis 2014:9–12, 100–2.

10 Lewis 2016:15.

11 See their essays in Protschky 2015: Pattynama 2015; Schulte Nordholt 2015; Strassler 2015. See also Strassler 2008:395–423; Ikeya 2011:7, 9.

12 Chakrabarty 2011:671.

13 Paraphrasing Benite 2011:647.

14 Engerman 2012:1402.

Partha Chatterjee's contention, derived from studying Indian mass politics, is that the condition of non- or incomplete citizenship not only held true for most Asians living under colonial regimes, but also persisted for many after the founding of independent nation-states. In global, historical terms, then, 'citizenship' has been the privilege of a minority and needs to be conceived primarily as an ideal.[15] Chatterjee thus signals an important continuity across the colonial and post-colonial periods, one that the first essay in this volume explicitly addresses.

Michael D. Pante examines how 'modern times' looked to the Southeast Asian elites who displaced their former colonizers as bureaucrats and urban planners. In the post-war Philippines, governmental referents for thinking about the nation and its future were rooted not just in the recent colonial past, they were also neo-colonial and internationalist in orientation, engaged with American programmes of Cold War diplomacy and expansion in the region. In Chapter 2, Pante investigates the development of Quezon City in the Philippines between 1939 and 1976, a plan that began under American occupation in the late nineteenth century and that was completed by American planners, agencies and capitalists after independence. Initially intended as a solution to housing shortages for working families in overcrowded Manila, Pante shows how city-dwellers here were pushed to the fringes of a new city as squatters who contributed to but did not reap the major benefits of development. In Quezon City, the modern, post-colonial metropolis was shaped by 'twin processes of domestication and democratization' that extended American notions of 'home' to middle and upper-class Filipinos, while marginalizing the poor to whom the nation's future was also supposed to belong.

Pante demonstrates the class distinctions between the bearers and beneficiaries of post-colonial modernity in 'developing' Southeast Asian nations, particularly the deferral of modernity's promises for the working and rural poor. For the latter, 'modern times' may well have looked strangely familiar, the pledges of democracy and egalitarian prosperity delayed now by local elites rather than foreign colonizers. On the one hand, then, Pante's chapter substantiates Dipesh Chakrabarty's observation that there is no such thing as an

> intrusion of the traditional into the realm of the modern. The subaltern classes are as caught up in modern institutions as the middle and upper classes are.[16]

15 Chatterjee 2004:34, 39.
16 Chakrabarty 2002:xx.

On the other hand, his chapter suggests that, following Partha Chatterjee, a 'politics of the governed' marked by adaptation and resistance to continuing inequality best describes the agency available to Southeast Asia's urban and rural poor in the transition to post-colonial nation-statehood.

The next two chapters explore how 'modern times' resonated for religious thinkers, worshippers and pilgrims in twentieth-century Indonesia. For the religious, modern times were neither secular, nation-centred, and development-oriented (in the capitalist sense) nor chiefly about gaining political citizenship, but rather, concerned with pan-Asian or global referents and aspirations for membership of international spiritual ecumenes or, indeed, theocracies. Scholars of South and Southeast Asia have advanced a critique of post-enlightenment narratives of modernization and the rise of the nation-state, which typically describe the abandonment of faith for reason, and the inexorable exclusion of religion from pedagogical and governing institutions. Locating religion outside the temporality of modernity, however, fails to account for its persistence except, inevitably, by invoking the 'anti-modern'.[17] Yet, throughout the twentieth century, the travel, civic participation, education, dress and consumption choices of many Southeast Asians remained manifestly informed by religion.[18]

In Chapter 3, Julian Millie examines the impact of modernist reformers of Islam active in the 1930s in developing concepts of normative publicness and virtuous citizenship in Indonesia. Here, Islamic reformers constituted networks of intellectual but also embodied communities through common experiences of travel, worship, debate and scholarship. They employed technologies that engaged wide audiences of believers, through print and oration at mass events, where microphones amplified the new national language, *bahasa Indonesia*, to thousands of listeners. Debates about the formal elements of worship and the political role of Islamic associations were played out in print venues such as specialist journals on Islamic issues, and at mass rituals such as important celebrations in the Muslim calendar, like *Maulid* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). Millie traces the complex legacy of these modernist reforms, revealing how some of the debates begun in the 1930s remain unresolved in the present. Further, he demonstrates that, while the public sphere modernist reformers carved out through Islamic practice in the 1930s was co-opted by Soeharto in the New Order period, this field originally developed *in parallel with* rather than subservience to nationalist agendas.

17 Menon 2002:1664; Chakrabarty 2002:xix; Gottowik 2014b.

18 See, for example, Hansen 2007; Laffan 2003; Taylor 2013:124–94.

In Chapter 4, Marieke Bloembergen follows spiritual movements on Java between the 1920s and 1970s. Networks of 'spiritual seekers' in Indonesia provide insights into the historical development and impact of transnational spiritual associations located in Java that spanned a 'Greater India', and involved the revival and transformation of a pan-Asian movement based on understandings of a regional Hindu-Buddhist heritage. Much like Millie's Islamic reformers—indeed, the two groups were active at the same time—Bloembergen's theosophically-inspired spiritual seekers formed communities through travel, intellectual interests and sites of worship that converged on Java. Her essay shows how distinctly supranational(ist) their networks were in their functions, outlook and aims, and in the profound local and regional effects of their activities well into the 1970s.

At this half-way point of *Modern Times in Southeast Asia*, the concerns of governing elites and their religious subjects and citizens could not be more dissonant, and yet they share this referent, 'modernity', a perceived condition that unifies those who claim to *be* it and/or who identify their pursuits as separate from it. We have now wandered into the unstable terrain of 'plural' modernities. The analytical sense of 'modernit*ies*' has been contested since Frederick Cooper published his influential critique more than a decade ago, but Southeast Asia specialists have only recently begun to consider the matter.[19] Cooper held that to conceive of modernity as a variable historical condition with many possible iterations empties the term of explanatory power.[20] Yet the notion that, alternatively, there could be only *one* modernity—which, in European(ist) historiography, originates from and most repletely manifests in Western Europe and North America some time during or after the eighteenth century—is routinely contradicted by historians of everywhere-outside-Europe (and before the eighteenth century). To claim modernity for a privileged historical few is to revive colonialist practices of positioning whole regions of the world as arrested in the past.[21] On the other hand, attempts rooted in post-colonial, nationalist agendas to democratize historical modernities have perpetrated fresh historical fallacies.[22] Examining 'modern times' in cross-sections between 1920 and 1970 when Southeast Asians claimed or aspired to be living as moderns confirms that the notion of single or plural 'modernities' remains difficult to conceptually substantiate as a condition separate from, for example, capitalism, urbanization, consumerism, or the rise of mass politics, and (ominously),

19 See, for example, Gottowik 2014a:10–4.

20 Cooper 2005:114, 129, 133.

21 Gluck 2011:676; Chakrabarty 2000, 2002.

22 Chakrabarty 2011:665, 672; Gluck 2011:676.

'globalization', another fraught term.[23] Yet, as the authors in *Modern Times* demonstrate, twentieth-century Southeast Asians engaged with all, some or more than these categories through their claims to inhabit, desire, oppose or contest them.

The second half of *Modern Times in Southeast Asia* examines representations of modernity by actors, artists, novelists and non-fiction writers whose works allow the authors to reflect (it is inescapable) on the conditions of modernity. Chapters 5 and 6 tackle visual entertainments in spheres of high and popular culture: respectively, the art exhibition and cinema. Tom van den Berge's essay examines the critical reception of European modern art exhibitions in Indonesia between the 1920s and the late 1950s, and the developing relationship of Indonesian painters to the European avant-garde in this period. Among Indonesian artists and political figures, the question of how an 'Indonesian' style should be expressed remained a contentious preoccupation from the 1920s until well into the post-independence era. Van den Berge reveals that Indonesian artists admired the social radicalism of European modern art, even if ultimately they were 'not enchanted' with its more abstract expressions. His essay shows how popular and elite concepts of 'modern' entertainment that were developed in print, particularly in response to art exhibitions in Indonesia across the period, informed how both colonial and post-colonial elites dismissed the giants of international modernism, notably Pablo Picasso. Across the twentieth century, then, Europe's painterly modernity held limited appeal for the makers of aesthetic tastes in Indonesia.

In Chapter 6, Timothy P. Barnard examines the representation of women in the Malay-language film industry that first emerged in Singapore in the 1950s and subsequently spread to Malaya. Over the decade when Malaya achieved independence from British colonial rule, in a period when nationalism, ethnic identity politics and women's rights were much debated in the public sphere, Barnard traces continuity and change in the roles that female actors were given, and in their unsuccessful fledgling attempts at directorial authority. He focuses especially on the depiction of women who were framed as 'modern'—those who had left the village for towns and cities, bought consumer durables and the latest fashions, and pursued romantic relationships outside their own class. In film, spatially and socially mobile women were spectacles of danger. In advertising—an early side venture for female actors—they were role models for 'ordinary' women, showing them how to refashion themselves as well as their homes. Behind the camera, their fame brought them limited agency within the industry, even if they were pioneering examples of women who

23 Cooper 2005:91–113.

were able to keep working after marriage. Barnard's study confirms how the emergence of the 'Modern Girl' in Malay-language film involved novel opportunities for liberation, but also renewed confinement to spheres of 'tradition', particularly where the woman's role was to mark the post-colonial nation out as non-western.[24]

Chapter 7, by Janit Feangfu and Rachel V. Harrison, examines modernity in Thailand from two perspectives: that of the monarchy, which lost its power to govern absolutely in the 1930s, and of the burgeoning socially and spatially mobile middle classes of Thailand. Their essay demonstrates how an incremental convergence between these two groups is evident in portrait photography, particularly for men, who continued to benefit from the privileges of occupying political public spheres through regime change across Thailand's mid-twentieth century. In literature, novelists explored modern times for young, educated, politically-conscious Thais as they moved between social classes and large cities and the countryside. In one of the most influential novels of the last century, Seni Saowaphong's *Pisat* (*The spectre*), Feangfu and Harrison identify the young protagonists as spectres of social change who haunt the 'old world' of Thailand's elite and their city-based centre of power. Originally published in 1953–1954, but gaining wide recognition only in the early 1970s, the novel's challenge to hierarchies of patriarchy and patronage resonated with the revolutionaries who deposed the military junta that had prevailed since the late 1950s. The literary depiction of the transformations to women's lives through education and employment were particularly radical. The novel represented the opening of opportunities for women to depart not only from the experience of their mothers, but also, in the case of rural and working class families, their fathers.

In Chapter 8, Chie Ikeya continues this exploration of 'history from the middle',[25] examining the transnational context and local legacies of the writings of P. Moe Nin (1883–1940), Myanmar's first sexologist, who was active during British rule of what was then known as Burma. While not as acclaimed as his journalism, Moe Nin's guides and treatises on love, intimacy and desire were popular among middle-class readers, and Ikeya reveals him to have been a pioneer in themes later taken up by other Burmese writers. Although a proponent of marriage and patriarchy, and concerned only with heterosexual love, Ikeya shows Moe Nin to have been a self-appointed translator of modernity for socially progressive Burmese. His *Treatise on the perfection of desire* was based on engagement with European sexology, and

24 Tran 2012; Taylor 1997.

25 Following Lewis 2016. See also Schulte Nordholt 2015.

Christian and Buddhist ideologies. It argued against 'traditional' silence on the important role of sex within marriage, and opposed many commonplace Burmese social practices, such as arranged marriages without the consent of the bride and groom, newlyweds living with their in-laws, the devaluation of domestic labour, and particularly, the insistence on brides being virgins without sexual desires. Instead, he promoted an ideal of companionate marriage based on the satisfaction of both parties, and in that regard, sought to democratize the private sphere in ways that neither colonial nor nationalist elites attended to.

Modern times at this point of the volume look like global capitalism, consumer culture and second-wave feminism, with profound artistic, sexual and social experiments possible for women. Su Lin Lewis' characterization of Southeast Asian 'modern girls' as 'shape-shifters' is apt, for it conjures both the freedoms and tribulations of modern times for women, as subjects with agency *and* objects of male prescriptions.[26] The authors in this volume argue that, in twentieth-century Southeast Asia, modern times sometimes seemed sexy and liberated, but otherwise remained bounded by familiar, gendered expectations that were upheld by nationalist elites and colonial authorities.[27] Diverging views over what freedoms the times allowed for women emerge most noticeably among the rising middle classes of Southeast Asia, whose avenues for self-expression and representation constitute complex sources of contention. For Southeast Asian men, modern times meant ceding some agency to women in the public sphere, the workplace, the home and also, perhaps, the bedroom. But, as the final essay in *Modern Times* demonstrates, the times also required men to be good fathers and moral citizens whose behaviours were expected to conform to heterosexual norms.

To this end, Chapter 9 examines French colonial interventions to shape good citizens among a vulnerable population—*métis* boys, the progeny of European fathers and Vietnamese mothers, living in orphanages as wards of the state. Christina Firpo focuses on moral panics among medical and religious authorities over homosexuality in these institutions. Efforts to socialize boys as Frenchmen drew upon colonial as well as post-colonial discourses of masculinity, citizenship and race. Orphanages sought to rescue Eurasian boys from their maternal Vietnamese heritage, which was thought to engender masturbation, effeminacy, promiscuity and homosexuality.

26 Lewis 2016:18.

27 Modern Girl Around the World Research Group 2005:245–50, 2008:8; Healey 1994:103; Ikeya 2011:96–119.

Instead, boys' homes for Eurasians trained their competence in French culture through exposure to French language, food and education, and—in anticipation of *re*productive, heterosexual fulfilment—encouragement of sexual abstinence. Together, these efforts were cast by medical and religious authorities as moral salvage operations that would turn Eurasian boys into Frenchmen. Importantly, even *after* the French exit from Indo-China, French-led welfare and protection societies for orphan boys continued their interventions based on notions of protection, the policing of *métis* bodies, and their investment not just with moral and racial obligations but with prescribed notions of citizenship. Firpo's essay therefore shows how colonial personnel working in concert with post-colonial nationalist elites were committed to re-masculinizing an Orient that had long been feminized in colonial discourses.[28]

In his intellectual history of novelty, Michael North observes that an awareness of rupture is

> commonly experienced as one of the abiding torments of modernity. A life of numbing routine, broken by spasmodic episodes of revolutionary violence, which then merely reestablish the same routine with a slightly different name.[29]

Frederick Cooper, by contrast, is dismissive of the idea that novelty is a defining feature of modernity, since encounters with the new occur in every age.[30] Historians of the pre-, early- and post-modern frequently substantiate this contention with evidence of social, political, economic and technological confrontations with novelty from their own periods.[31] The purpose of such examples for historians of Southeast Asia, particularly for early-modernists, has typically been to locate the advent of modernity further back in the past. The debate then turns not on *whether* novelty is a condition of modernity, but *when* it commences.[32] Historians of late modernity, by contrast, often define the key condition of their period as novelty-fatigue. For late-moderns, the continuous encounter with innovation and change engenders longing for 'tradition' and anxiety for the future. At this juncture, "[m]odernity invents tradition, suppresses its own continuities with the past, and produces nostalgia for what

28 Tanabe and Tokita-Tanabe 2003:5; Ikeya 2011:4–5.
29 North 2013:124.
30 Cooper 2005:119.
31 Andaya 1997:397, 405; Andaya and Andaya 1995:92; Symes 2011:719–20, 724.
32 Andaya 1997:397, 401, 405.

has already been lost".[33] As North's work demonstrates, however, in the realms of art and science as well as in everyday social life, there is no such condition as the completely new. Rather, 'novelty' usually entails the recombination of existing conditions to produce a transformation that is *experienced* as radically disruptive.[34] The essays in *Modern Times in Southeast Asia* advance the argument that everyday experiences of modernity were complex indexes of continuity and change in the transition from colonialism to post-colonialism in the twentieth century. Modern times sometimes ushered new people with novel powers but old ideas into public spheres, and at other times, brought new ideas from old places to novel audiences. The new and the familiar appear and recede at surprising moments and places, often with oblique reference to the major regime changes of the twentieth century, but with roots and tendrils that reach in many directions and that can, as the authors demonstrate, be traced, at times.

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33 Friedman 2006:434; Harootunian 2000:70.

34 North 2013:40, 42.

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CHAPTER 2

Modern Living in Third-World Suburbia

Quezon City, 1939–1976

Michael D. Pante

Introduction

The urban history of the greater Manila area, as it grew from a Spanish walled city to a sprawling multi-city metropolis, forces us to reconsider the traditional periodization of Philippine history. Such a periodization divides time according to changes in political regimes: the Spanish colonial period (1565–1898), revolution (1896–1902), American colonial period (1898–1946), Japanese occupation (1942–1945), and the post-war era (1946 onwards). Aspects of this chronological framework in Philippine historiography can be traced as far back as the late nineteenth century when Spanish-educated Filipino nationalists conceptualized a linear, tripartite version of Philippine history that was divided into precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods.[1] Nationalist historiography has followed this way of reckoning time since the 1960s, with some important challenges to this periodization arising from the 1980s.[2]

In this chapter I examine how notions of modern city living, American expertise, and a (neo)colonial political economy survived the war and early decades of independence in the greater Manila area. I offer in this essay the case of Quezon City, a planned city that emerged in the pre-war era and became the capital after the war. Other scholars have begun to look at urban Southeast Asia to unpack the complexities of decolonization, as shown by recent studies on Indonesian urbanism.[3] For example, Freek Colombijn has shown how the study of cities offers new ways of looking at the decolonization process by examining developments that are imperceptible at the national level but relevant at the local level. Urban history is useful for studying state–society

1 Aguilar 2010.

2 For example, John Larkin (1982), David Timberman (1991), Benedict Kerkvliet (1993) have presented alternative views regarding temporal labels in Philippine history. For an interrogation of the notion of a 'post-colonial period', see Pomeroy 1970; Ordoñez 2003:86; Karnow 1989:323–55; Hedman and Sidel 2000.

3 Colombijn and Coté 2015.

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dynamics and the salience of ethnicity.[4] Colombijn considers "decolonization [as] an extended process" in Indonesia that encompasses the time both before and after the Revolution.[5] I look at Quezon City within the same time frame as an extension of colonization in Philippine history.

Although imagined as a post-colonial capital, Quezon City's ideational foundations and suburban antecedents were distinctively colonial in character. In the independence period, American capital and expertise remained crucial in sustaining its financial and ideological viability. Rather than attributing modernity entirely to foreign colonizers, this chapter argues that it was Filipino elites and the middle class who also shaped modern times in Quezon City. Filipino elites brought about shifts in architectural styles and in Manila's suburbanization. Filipino politicians were also the leading visionaries and governors behind Quezon City's founding and administration. Colonial/post-colonial continuities do not signal the simple perpetuation of US dominance over a helpless Philippines.[6] Rather, ideologies of modernity benefitted both foreign and indigenous elites in twentieth-century Quezon City. That is, even after the end of colonialism, the native elite's ascendancy assured the continuation of a modern culture that colonialism had set in motion.

Suburbanization in the Greater Manila Area, c.1900 to 1930s

The roots of Quezon City can be traced to Manila's rapid urbanization in the nineteenth century, when the country was still under Spanish colonial rule. With Manila's de facto opening to international trade beginning in the 1790s, urban activity accelerated in its downtown districts. The wealth generated by trade and consequent improvements in transport allowed many residents to build their residences away from the city centre, leading to the rise of affluent residential areas in peripheral districts. At the same time, this suburban upswing was encroaching upon landed estates that were home to peasants. With the change of colonial regime in the early 1900s, from Spain to the United States, the move into the suburbs continued.

The new colonizers played a crucial role in the suburbanization process. Manila, the Americans believed, deserved an 'imperial makeover' to address issues such as unsanitary conditions and overcrowding in the central districts.[7]

4 Colombijn 2010:4–6.
5 Colombijn 2010:7.
6 Cullather 1994.
7 Doeppers 2010.

The main instrument for this makeover was Daniel Burnham's 1905 state-commissioned urban plan. At the same time, through collective consumption and motorized transport, Americans suburbanized the idyllic and 'undeveloped' peripheries of Manila. A suburban lifestyle became equated with modern living and was distinctly colonial.[8] Manila Americans maintained an insulated way of living in the city,[9] notwithstanding the lack of explicit ethnic segregation schemes that characterized contemporary colonial cities. Most importantly, the majority of the real estate companies that catered to this emerging suburban lifestyle were American-owned. These companies developed middle- to upper-class residential subdivisions for American and Filipino households.[10]

The sociopolitical landscape of Manila's outskirts proved a challenge to these programmes. At the beginning of American colonial rule, Manila's peripheries were hostile spaces for the new colonizers. Rizal Province enveloped all of the city's land borders, and the first major battles of the Philippine-American War occurred here. And despite the proclamation of the formal end of hostilities in 1902 these areas remained, to an extent, *terra incognita* for the colonizers due to the presence of guerillas who continued the struggle; hence, the delay in suburbanization.[11] In the case of early twentieth-century Manila, Americans had to contend not only with the 'savage' *insurrectos*, but also with the 'feudal' remnants of Spanish rule: the vast rural haciendas, almost all friar-owned. Through the 1903 Friar Lands Act, the US colonial state purchased these haciendas and distributed them to peasant cultivators. The law was not completely implemented,[12] and many landholdings in Manila's peripheries remained untouched. The peasants' loss became the suburban real estate developers' gain.

Suburban developments sprouted in two distinct zones, south and east of Manila. In the southern zone the districts of Ermita, Malate, and Paco and the town of Pasay in Rizal Province became the site of many first-class homes and developed a reputation as upscale residential areas.[13] Ermita, as well as the other southern districts, was "occupied largely by Americans and the well-to-do classes".[14] Meanwhile, in Paco, real estate entrepreneur H.M. Jones built a subdivision in 1903 with rectilinear streets named after US states, such as

8 Pante 2011.
9 Horn 1941:90–1; Wheeler 1966:362.
10 Yamaguchi 2006:413–4.
11 Carman 1922:11.
12 Escalante 2002.
13 Robb 1930:9.
14 Clark 1905:856.

Colorado, California, and Pennsylvania.[15] Suburbanization in the south continued from the 1910s to the 1930s, still with significant participation from American residents and continuous increase in real estate values.[16] Practically the same pattern occurred in the eastern zone, in the districts of Sampaloc and Santa Ana and the town of San Juan del Monte. Santa Mesa, an area in Sampaloc, became "a favorite residence spot for many of the American and foreign residents" in the first decade of the twentieth century.[17] The 'eastern peripheries' attracted Americans because of their hilly topography and supposed salubrious environment and soon became the site of modern bungalows and villas with lawns, gardens, swimming pools and tennis courts—amenities associated with American suburbia.[18] For the American colonial elite, suburbanization was a twin process of 'domestication and democratization' premised on access to land and housing at the expense of protestors and dispossessed peasants.

American-owned real estate companies bought partial or entire friar haciendas and turned them into suburban residential areas. One example was the 230-hectare San Francisco del Monte Subdivision, which a certain John Gordon purchased from the Franciscans in 1924. The first sales of the subdivision were made in December 1925.[19] The area just outside Manila's northeastern borders fit the classic frontier-to-suburb mould:

> During the Philippine Revolution the barrio was burned and in fact from the time of the American occupation until the launching of the [San Francisco del Monte] Subdivision, the barrio was inhabited by only a few families living on the products of the soil.[20]

Perhaps the most notable development in Manila's suburban area was the Diliman Estate. Although not a friar hacienda, the feudal nature of the estate represented an undemocratic order for the Americans. In 1794 the Spanish colonial government entailed the estate to Antonio Tuason, a Catholic Chinese mestizo, in appreciation for raising an army of Chinese mestizos against the British occupation forces in the 1760s.[21] By the mid-nineteenth

15 Robb 1927.
16 Robb 1927:12, 1930:9; Carman 1922; Wheeler 1966:362.
17 *Manila* 1908:35.
18 For 'eastern peripheries', see Pante 2011:188; *Enlarging boundaries* 1937; Ingersoll 1971:34.
19 *Enlarging boundaries* 1937:40.
20 Salonga 1934:140.
21 *Medieval mayorazgo* 1926; *Christian centuries* 1940.

century, the estate had become the "fabulous Teresa de la Paz Estate, the biggest private hacienda in the Philippines next to those of the religious orders".[22] It consisted of the Mariquina and Santa Mesa-Diliman haciendas. In the 1920s factions of the Tuason family became embroiled in a legal scramble over the estate, which was then valued at almost six million pesos.[23] Apparently, the Tuasons had earned so much by leasing portions of their land to suburban real estate developers, such as Santa Mesa Heights, which had a lease contract that would last until 1953. On the surface, the Americans' interest in this issue lay in the fact that the "most valuable portion of the estate, Santa Mesa Heights, is built over with homes, American homes, chiefly".[24] However, that there was an ideological value of having suburban subdivisions in the middle of a 'feudal domain' is also significant. Ex-Justice Fred C. Fisher's legal opinion of the Tuasons' courtroom battle provides us with this alternative angle:

> It takes us back to a vanished age. It deals with a pernicious legal institution which was the outgrowth of feudalism and absolute monarchy of the Middle Ages.[25]

The examples of San Francisco del Monte and Santa Mesa-Diliman, both located in Rizal Province, reveal how the parcelling out of estates in the peripheries of Manila was a form of domestication and democratization that benefitted elites: the 'freedom' of middle-class private consumption vis-à-vis the economic and political monopoly exercised by the haciendas. These opportunities enabled escape from the escalating values of land in the central business district[26] and the freedom to purchase comfort. To attract buyers who wanted both value for money and comfort, American real estate developers emphasized an 'underpopulated' image of the suburbs.[27] Elite Filipinos were able to do the same. As we shall see, the Filipino elites' establishment of Quezon City was built upon a post-colonial yearning, but also anchored in notions of suburban living that were a legacy of American colonialism.

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22 Santiago 1998:340.
23 *Medieval mayorazgo* 1926:15.
24 *Medieval mayorazgo* 1926:17.
25 *Medieval mayorazgo* 1926:15.
26 Carman 1921.
27 *Enlarging boundaries* 1937:40.

The Emergence of Quezon City, 1935–1941

In a 1939 speech, Manuel Quezon shared his vision for Quezon City:

> It will be a model Philippine city with streets as big and wide as the spacious avenues of the cities in Europe and America, and the Government will establish there modern communities where our laborers can live in a comfortable manner appropriate to their well-being.[28]

Although elite Filipino politicians envisioned Quezon City as the premier city of the future independent nation-state, I argue that they reinforced rather than severed colonial connections in the urban development of Manila's suburbs. The ideological foundations, planning and political economy of the city bore the stamp of colonial tutelage.

By 1935 Philippine officials were already discussing a bill to fuse certain towns in Rizal province with Manila to formally create a Greater Manila Area. The bill passed the Senate but floundered in the House. Two years later the Municipal Board of Manila and Philippine president Manuel Quezon (1878–1944) agreed on another proposal to include parts of the province, such as San Juan del Monte and San Francisco del Monte, under the jurisdiction of Manila. Most of the affected real estate developers and brokers protested, however, including the American Chamber of Commerce, itself a mouthpiece of American real estate magnates.[29]

Despite these early setbacks, Quezon pursued his plan to redraw the boundaries of Manila and its environs. The realization of his dream came in the establishment in 1939 of Quezon City, a purpose-built, planned city carved out of the territories of a number of Rizal towns surrounding Manila. Quezon and his fellow politicians envisioned Quezon City as a symbol of the ideals of the nation that was to be born following eventual independence, a 'dream city'.[30] In contrast, Manila represented a colonial past from which Quezon City was escaping.

Similar to the ideological foundations of the frontier suburbs, Quezon City represented the Filipino elites' desire to 'democratize and domesticate' the area around Manila. The space that constituted the new city was a result of the Quezon government's acquisition of eight large estates, including the Tuason's Diliman Estate and the San Francisco Del Monte Estate. The Diliman Estate became the centrepiece of a housing project under the government-owned

28 Quezon 1941:212.
29 *Enlarging boundaries* 1937.
30 Hayden 1947:304.

corporation, the People's Homesite Corporation (PHC). The PHC oversaw the subdivision of the estate into smaller lots and their sale to working class and government employees at affordable prices. Through the PHC, Quezon intended Quezon City to help alleviate Manila's woes—unemployment, slums, unsanitary conditions—and become a "model workers' community".[31] Since its early residents were mostly commuters who derived their livelihood from places of work based in Manila, Quezon City was "essentially a Manila suburb".[32] The sale of lots began in January 1940 at a price range of P2.50–P7 per square metre, payable either in cash or instalments.[33] In 1941 Quezon claimed the project was a success and declared that the PHC planned to expand its housing programme.[34]

American expertise defined the aesthetics of the city plan in ways that resonate throughout the twentieth century. Quezon turned to five consultants, led by Harry Frost, to apply "city planning in its modern concept" for the urban plan of Quezon City.[35] Frost was the architectural adviser of the Commonwealth government and a partner in the US firm Bennett & Frost, which had been involved in significant urban improvements in Washington, DC, and Chicago. Under Frost were Alpheus D. Williams, former director of the Bureau of Public Works, and William Parsons, an American architect and planner, who helped in selecting the Diliman estate as the main site for the new city. Lastly, landscape architect Louis Croft prepared the layout of the major thoroughfares in the reorganized greater Manila area.[36]

Although Frost saw how Quezon City and Manila stood in contrast to American cities, especially in terms of automobility and urban decay,[37] the influence of American planning on the new city can be seen, for example, in the cultivation of civic virtue. Just like in the 1902 McMillan Plan of Washington, DC, the Frost plan was conceived along the lines of an 'urban renewal' and

31 Manuel L. Quezon, "Fifth state of the nation address", 22-01-1940, pp. 8–12, in: National Library of the Philippines, Manila, Manuel L. Quezon Papers, Series III, Box 20; Manuel L. Quezon, "Sixth state of the nation address", 31-01-1941, p. 47, in: National Library of the Philippines, Manila, Manuel L. Quezon Papers, Series III, Box 21.

32 *Quezon City* 1941:9.

33 *Diliman lots* 1939.

34 Manuel L. Quezon, "Sixth state of the nation address", 31-01-1941, p. 47, in: National Library of the Philippines, Manila, Manuel L. Quezon Papers, Series III, Box 21.

35 Jorge B. Vargas, "City and national–regional planning in the Philippines: Its nature, problems", 1953, p. 1. in: Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, Quezon City, SG: National Planning Commission, Folder 2.

36 *Master plan* 1940:AP-1; *Municipal architecture* 1940; Alcazaren, Ferrer, Icamina and Oshima 2011:59.

37 Frost 1940.

'civic design', defined of course based on the perspective of elites. It featured the same wide avenues, vast open spaces, and imposing government buildings that characterized the "architectural scenography of Washington, DC".[38]

American advisers, through formal and informal linkages, also influenced other aspects of Quezon City's early history. One example was the decision to relocate the University of the Philippines (UP), the country's premier university that was built by the Americans in 1908, from Manila to the new city. The UP Board of Regents, upon Quezon's request, conducted a study and hired two American consultants for advice on the relocation. In 1938 Purdue University President Charles Edward Elliot and Dean Paul C. Packer of Iowa University recommended UP's transfer from its Manila campus to Diliman.[39] The government heeded the advice and purchased a site here from the Tuason family. According to Quezon, the transfer was needed to create in UP a proper university atmosphere and a larger physical plant to sustain up-to-date instruction, especially in the sciences.[40] The plan was to complete the transfer by June 1942, but was thwarted by the outbreak of World War Two.[41]

The political economy of Quezon City also revealed another facet of American influence. The construction of the city was made possible by the huge sums of money the Commonwealth government derived from coconut oil exports. This financial windfall was a result of the end of direct US colonial rule: to reduce the effects of the end of free trade between the two countries at the onset of Commonwealth government, the US regularly remitted to the Philippine government the taxes collected from coconut oil imported to America from the Philippines. The resulting fund was such a rich source of revenue that the Commonwealth government was able to finance a wave of construction projects focused on "large government buildings and [...] wide avenues in Manila, including the great Circumferential Road" which traversed Quezon City.[42] It was also the source of the P2 million allocated in 1938 for the purchase of large landed estates and the P8.5 million budget for UP's relocation.[43]

Despite the political and economic machineries backing its establishment, Quezon City had to face grassroots resistance during its early years. Long-time residents in villages that were absorbed by Quezon City tried to assert their survival in a rapidly changing landscape. When the government began buying

38 Lico 2003:34.
39 *Transfer UP* 1938.
40 Quezon 1939:21.
41 *In summary* 1939; *Municipal architecture* 1940:11.
42 Hartendorp 1958:411.
43 Quezon 1940:48–50.

land from landowners to establish right-of-way for road construction projects, residents demanded greater valuations for their land than what the state offered them. For example, in Barrio Kangkong, the government wanted to build a 50-meter boulevard and residents took their demands for adequate compensation to the courts.[44] Although they failed, the incident showed the conflicts generated by the state's drive to 'modernize' Quezon City. At this time, the city was "a virtual no-man's land".[45] Filipino and Chinese gangs operated in areas that were only later integrated into the city, especially near red-light districts like La Loma.[46]

A Post-Colonial Capital? From the Japanese Occupation to Independence

In the first few years after the war, the ideal of turning Quezon City into a model workers' community for a newly independent nation did not materialize. Instead, a polarized urban settlement emerged: a stark trichotomy that separated the middle-class and high-class residential enclaves funded, at least partially, by American capital, from the slum dwellers who were marginalized in the Greater Manila area and had to assert their space in the city through informal housing.

During the War in the Pacific, as part of their campaign to erase all vestiges of American influence in the country, Japanese occupation forces reorganized Manila. They drew new boundaries for Manila, whose territory at this point included the areas under Quezon City and the erstwhile separate Rizal towns of Caloocan, San Juan del Monte, Mandaluyong, Makati, Pasay and Parañaque. They divided this enlarged Manila into ten districts. Two of these, Balintawak and Diliman, had been parts of Quezon City, which the Japanese had abolished perhaps to minimize the evocation of the memory of President Quezon, who at the time led the Philippine government-in-exile in the US. In Manila the Japanese also renamed places that were associated with American colonialism with 'native names'. As such, Quezon City became Balintawak and Diliman, while parts of Manila were renamed Bagumbuhay (New Life), Bagumpanahon (New Era), Bagungdiwa (New Spirit), and Bagumbayan (New Town).[47]

44 Capellan 1941.
45 Malcolm 1957:182.
46 Macaraig 1929:414.
47 *City Gazette* (16 October 1942):24–5. The *City Gazette* was published fortnightly by the Office of the Mayor of the City of Manila.

Although these changes were reversed at the end of the Japanese occupation, the physical destruction of the greater Manila area posed problems for post-war urban planners and administrators.

The US reoccupation of the Philippines starting in 1944 not only signalled the end of the war but also the impending transfer of sovereignty to a newly established Third Philippine Republic. However, these changes did nothing to alter the structures of Philippine society.[48] 'Special relations', a euphemism for neocolonialism, defined the asymmetrical interaction between the two countries in both the economic and political spheres.[49]

According to architectural historian Gerard Lico, the end of the war presented an opportunity for Filipinos to "reinvent themselves" and "reinterpret their identity" through the architecture and urban plan of their capital, especially since "the Philippines had no discernable architectural product to speak of".[50] While Lico's last claim is contentious, his point about the emergence of an opportunity is correct. However, what happened was a continuation of an urbanism derived from US concepts and designs. Given the scale of devastation, the immediate post-war period, notwithstanding the transfer of sovereignty in 1946, saw the continued influence of American institutions over almost all aspects of governance. US rehabilitation agencies proliferated and gained strategic positions in Philippine political, economic, social and military affairs. As late as 1947, these agencies and their personnel were numerous, "far exceeding the American establishment here before the war".[51] Their presence in Quezon City was widespread, from the setting up of the Joint US Military Advisory Group headquarters in Camp Murphy to the malaria control units the US Public Health Service deployed in 1948.[52]

While pre-war Filipino politicians identified Quezon City as the future capital when they established it in 1939, the war made Filipino officials think twice about its feasibility. Although the war had destroyed Manila and rendered it incapable of serving as the capital, Filipino politicians could not immediately develop Quezon City as Manila's replacement because post-war rehabilitation was a more pressing matter for the cash-strapped government.[53] Nevertheless, Manila's destruction gave Filipino politicians another reason to ponder the question of moving the capital city to an alternative location. On 23 July 1946,

48 Kerkvliet 1993.
49 Taylor 1964; Roxas 1946:9.
50 Lico 2008:375.
51 Hartendorp 1958:253.
52 *Annual report* 1956:12; *Master plan* 1949:AP-24.
53 Malcolm 1957:182.

President Manuel Roxas (1892–1948) created a selection committee, headed by Senator Melecio Arranz, to identify the most suitable site for the new capitol. Louis Croft, Roxas's Adviser on Land Planning, served as adviser.[54] Even before the creation of this committee, Croft, who had been part of Frost's team for the pre-war Quezon City master plan, was already at the helm of things: in February 1945 President Sergio Osmeña tasked him to prepare plans for the reconstruction of destroyed towns and cities and in 1946 appointed him to be part of the National Urban Planning Commission.[55]

During Croft's tenure, American notions of urbanism continued to play a significant role in the country, exemplified by the selection of Quezon City as capital city. The Capitol Site Selection Committee believed that its territory had to be expanded to include the foothills of Ipo and the rolling grounds of Novaliches, not just to accommodate future development and population growth, but also in consideration of the benefits of elevated terrain:

> with high and covered ground to make up for the deficiencies of the original Quezon City in these respects consisting as it does of relatively low ground, with poor soil, dearth of vegetation and lack of natural protection for military defense.[56]

The committee listed its "healthfulness due to its elevation" as one of Quezon City's advantages, while its vast areas of low-lying ground were cited as one of its drawbacks. Compared to the high-altitude areas of Baguio, Tagaytay, and Antipolo, the city was not as salubrious.[57] Apparently, Filipino officials still subscribed to the notion of topographical elevation as a marker of the healthfulness of a place, a legacy of American colonial rule.[58] In fact, a 1953 Quezon City souvenir programme linked the city's "delightful climate, fresh air, glorious warm sunny days for sun bathing, cool and invigorating nights for refreshing sleep" with its reputation as a "sanctuary of rest and cure".[59]

54 "Report of the Committee on Capital City Site", Manila, 07-07-1947, p. 5, in: School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) Library, University of the Philippines, Quezon City.

55 Jorge B. Vargas, "City and national–regional planning in the Philippines: Its nature, problems", 1953, p. 1. in: Jorge B. Vargas Museum and Filipiniana Research Center, Quezon City, SG: National Planning Commission, Folder 2.

56 "Report of the Committee on Capital City Site", Manila, 07-07-1947, p. 13, in: School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) Library, University of the Philippines, Quezon City.

57 "Report of the Committee on Capital City Site", Manila, 07-07-1947, p. 14, in: School of Urban and Regional Planning (SURP) Library, University of the Philippines, Quezon City.

58 Pante 2011.

59 Sarte and Agbayani 1953:31.

Colonial expertise also played a role in the drafting of a new urban plan for Quezon City. Even if Filipino architects were the main actors involved in this project, American notions of ordered space and urban aesthetics still defined the master plan. Juan Arellano, chair of the Capital City Planning Commission and one of the architects under Frost in the drafting of the pre-war master plan, was a product of the *pensionado* system, an institution the American colonial state established to allow exceptionally bright Filipinos to study in US universities.[60] Croft served as an adviser in his capacity as head of the National Urban Planning Commission. Stating their intention "to build a great, modern and beautiful city" that would serve "as the citadel of democracy in the Orient",[61] the planners gave the city a design that was reminiscent of Washington, DC. The result was the 1949 Quezon City master plan.

One of the most important effects of the war was the acute housing shortage in the greater Manila area.[62] Thousands of residents were rendered homeless and had no recourse but to build makeshift shelters. By 1968, Manila had around 80,436 slum dwellers and squatters, while Quezon City had 32,747.[63] The official state response to the housing crisis was a series of low-cost housing projects that targeted the lower and lower-middle classes. Leading the charge was the chief housing agency, the People's Homesite and Housing Corporation (PHHC), which was established in 1947 to replace the PHC.[64] Quezon City was at the forefront of many of the PHHC's campaigns. It was the location of the flagship housing projects of the first three post-war Philippine presidents—Roxas (1946–1948), Elpidio Quirino (1948–1953), and Ramon Magsaysay (1953–1957).

The government's general analysis of the housing situation came from American experts, such as Bernard Wagner, whose comprehensive housing report was finally submitted in 1968.[65] Wagner's consultancy work for the Philippine government was made possible through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The government also turned to American experts for specific projects. It sought G.F. Cordner's advice on the site plan and house constructions in PHHC's Low Cost Housing Project No. 3 in Cubao. Cordner was a housing specialist from the Mutual Security Agency (MSA), a US rehabilitation agency and predecessor of the present-day USAID.[66] Moreover,

60 Ordoñez 2003:87–8.
61 *Master plan* 1949:5.
62 *Master plan* 1949:26.
63 Laquian 1969:216–7.
64 Careaga 1952.
65 Wagner 1968.
66 Hartendorp 1958:404; Taylor 1964:5–6.

the Philippine Council on US Aid (PHILCUSA) developed the land that eventually became the site of Low Cost Housing Project 7 in Bago Bantay. PHILCUSA was a government agency that President Quirino established in 1950 to send Washington, DC, proposals for US aid-funded projects.[67] If Quezon City's pre-war development hinged upon the coconut oil excise tax from the US, its post-war progress—mainly in the form of low-cost housing projects—was dependent upon US aid.

Even with the help of American experts and aid, however, national and local politicians failed to address the housing situation. At the national level, the PHHC was slow to act: a government report revealed that from 1947 to 1962 the agency built only 12,000 dwelling units in 17 projects, and none from 1963 to 1968.[68] In 1960 PHHC was already on the verge of bankruptcy.[69] The dire state of housing was also apparent in the fact that private financing funded 79 percent of all housing constructions that year.[70] Meanwhile, local officials treated slum dwellers as a menace that needed to be eradicated through a series of slum clearances and relocations. Manila officials chose Quezon City as one of the main sites to absorb these people.[71] Clearly, it was the political elite who defined modern times in Quezon City, and whose interests were served by visions of city living that excluded the poor.

While the poor were forced to make do with informal settlements, the middle and upper classes continued the pre-war trend of the suburban push toward Manila's peripheries. Enabling this was the decay of Manila's traditional elite districts, like Ermita and Malate, which at this point were attracting desperate informal settlers. After the war, many of the Manila Americans who initially resided in Ermita and Malate turned to newly created subdivisions south of Manila, especially in Forbes Park and San Lorenzo Village in Makati. McCallus notes that as a result of this trend,

> many of the Americans in Manila, like their counterparts in the United States, became suburbanized: a commuting, a golf-playing, party-giving lifestyle seemingly straight out of a John Cheever story.[72]

67 Hartendorp 1958:143; *Annual report* 1956:42; Laquian 1969:23.
68 Hartendorp 1958:222.
69 Hartendorp 1961:70.
70 Laquian 1969:227, 230.
71 Alcazaren, Ferrer, Icamina and Oshima 2011:64.
72 McCallus 1999:80.

Reconceptualizing the City during the Cold War, 1945–1972

The Cold War in the Philippines was played out in violent confrontations in the countryside, but also had an urban dimension. Continuing a long heritage as a cradle of unrest, the fringes of Manila became the site of raids during the Hukbalahap rebellion, which began in 1948. The Huks, as the rebels were more popularly known, were peasant guerillas who fought the Japanese and eventually turned against the Philippine state as a result of decades of marginalization and discontent.[73] Much of the armed encounter happened in Central and Southern Luzon, regions that lay just outside the metropolitan area. Unrest in the countryside surrounding the greater Manila area contributed to the massive post-war rural-to-urban migration and worsened the urban housing situation.[74] Manila Americans residing in Forbes Park in the 1940s and 1950s recalled their fear when they heard the news that Huks passed through the town of Makati down McKinley Road, which was the main access street for the subdivision.[75] Other Americans remembered Manila's supposed "wild west atmosphere" due to the proliferation of guns among Filipinos.[76] In Quezon City the military posted checkpoints along Quezon Boulevard, which connected the city to Manila. In 1950 the Huks attacked the Philippine Constabulary in Balara, Quezon City, which was just outside the UP Campus, "sending dorm residents to take cover in basements and the law building".[77]

The danger posed by the Huk rebellion affected elite urban lifestyles. Physical security became a priority for residential areas, especially those on the peripheries of the metropolis. Against this backdrop, the Philippine American Life Insurance Company (Philam Life) constructed a subdivision in the north of Quezon City. Philam Life was established using American capital in the colonial period. Alabama native Earl Carroll, the "colossus of Philippine insurance",[78] was the main figure behind the company. After World War Two, with the Philippines in dire need of capital for reconstruction, Carroll led the way in establishing Philam Life in 1947 and became its first president. Paul V. McNutt, the last US High Commissioner to the Philippines and the first US ambassador to the country, served as Chairman of the Board. One of Philam

73 Hartendorp 1961:404–5.
74 Caoili 1999:60.
75 McCallus 1999:80–1.
76 McCallus 1999:97.
77 Ordoñez 2003:7.
78 De Jesus and Quirino 1980.

Life's founders, Cornelius Vander Starr, was a known operative of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the precursor of today's Central Intelligence Agency.[79] At a time when the country lacked capital, Philam Life provided urban residents with loans that allowed them to purchase and build houses in Quezon City.[80]

Philam Life's role goes beyond providing housing loans. On 22 October 1952, President Quirino conferred with PHHC officials, Secretary of Labor Jose Figueras, and Carroll and Ramon V. del Rosario of Philam Life to discuss the company's plans for building a housing project in Quezon City. The year after, the company bought from the PHHC a 41-hectare property within the Diliman Quadrangle, which became the P10-million Philam Life Homes Project, designed to accommodate 600 two- or three-room bungalows in 400 square-metre lots.[81] Philam Life Homes, which catered to the middle and upper classes, was touted as the first gated community in the Philippines. Security was the primary consideration for the 'suburban innovation' of enclosing the perimeter of the residential area with walls that were guarded at the gates. This feature became a distinguishing mark for subsequent middle- and upper-class subdivisions worthy of the name, and a clear outcome of the ongoing Huk rebellion. The impact of the rebellion and, from a wider perspective, the Cold War, also manifested in how Philam Life reframed the issue of housing away from a leftist interpretation:

> This [example set by Philam Life] must be encouraged for unless private capital is mustered and channeled to mass housing, the government will find itself alone facing a tremendous task under the critical scrutiny of a restless people, who are fast becoming adherents of the doctrine that housing, like the government railroad and water system, is not only too big for private business, but, like education and national defense, is also an obligation of the government.[82]

Carroll employed a hands-on approach in this important project. He picked Carlos Arguelles as the architect for the development. Arguelles, who earned his architecture degree from the University of Santo Tomas, finished his graduate studies in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.[83] Aside from his MIT

79 De Jesus and Quirino 1980:125.
80 Tolentino 1958.
81 *Phil-Am plan* 1952.
82 Careaga 1952:5.
83 De Jesus and Quirino 1980:158–9.

training, his knowledge of American architecture and housing trends was bolstered by Carroll's decision to send him on a US trip so that he could visit

> projects in New York, Philadelphia, New Jersey, and other states on the East Coast, paying particular attention to the low-cost housing projects developed for World War Two veterans.[84]

Helping Arguelles was Angel Nakpil, a Harvard-educated architect who also served as Manila's City Planning Commissioner from 1947 to 1949.

Arguelles and Nakpil gave the Philam Life subdivision the amenities of suburban living: a clubhouse, basketball and tennis courts, and a swimming pool.[85] The houses were "single-detached bungalows with very low or no fences and spacious fronts and backyards" with individual garages.[86] Clearly, Carroll "wanted to build an American-inspired community patterned after the manner by which houses and neighborhoods [were] built in the United States".[87]

More than just creating a residential area, Carroll's vision was of a 'model community'. Potential home owners were screened before sold their houses. Carroll pleaded to the homeowners:

> We have turned over to your good selves these housing units, all modern bungalows, designed stateside for better living. Now it is up to you and to your children, it is up to you and to your respective families, to make homes out of these houses. But, please, all according to the rules![88]

The so-called 'stateside design' stood in stark opposition to the intent of the 1949 Quezon City master plan to feature in the city "a restrained Filipino-Malay-Spanish style of architecture, along modern and functional lines".[89]

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84 De Jesus and Quirino 1980:159.

85 De Jesus and Quirino 1980:159–60.

86 Ignacio 2010:49.

87 Ignacio 2010:47. At the time, the suburbanization of the US was proceeding at full speed. Building upon the earlier development of streetcar suburbs, which emerged in the late nineteenth century, post-war cities relied on automobility for the geographical expansion of America's population. Automobiles sparked the suburban boom in the 1920s, and by the 1950s a quarter of the US population were suburban residents. Typically, suburban homes were single-detached structures with a yard and occupied by a middle- or upper-middle-class nuclear family. On the history of US suburbanization, see Jackson 1985; Wright 1981; Kruse and Sugrue 2006.

88 Ignacio 2010:53.

89 *Master plan* 1949:AP-8.

This so-called Filipino-Malay-Spanish style was a product of the merging of colonial and indigenous designs in the Spanish period, particularly as exemplified by the *bahay na bato* (literally, house of stone), which became prominent in Manila and other Philippine cities in the late nineteenth century. This design remained popular in Manila's pre-war suburbs, but was challenged by other styles coming from the US and then eventually supplanted in the early post-war decades. Along with the post-war boom in subdivision development, bungalow housing became the preferred dwelling unit of the middle class. The emergence of new styles signalled changes in the use of domestic space among the middle and upper classes. One example was the abandonment of the notion that the first floor was unfit for human habitation and reserved for holding the family carriage or automobile.

The modernist planning and architecture of Philam Life Homes set the template for other subdivisions established in Quezon City in subsequent decades. Elite residential areas like Greenmeadows and Corinthian Gardens were based on the idea of spatial exclusivity enforced by perimeter walls and roving private security guards. Subdivisions like White Plains and Blue Ridge,

> named after famous planned communities in [the] eastern United States [...] provided suburban refuge to the middle and upper class escaping the declining quality of urban life of central Manila.[90]

While the Philam Life Homes represented the apparent success of an Americanized middle-class modernity, it was actually being challenged from all fronts. Lower-income residents appropriated the city in a manner that subverted this mode of living. The Bago Bantay resettlement project, a clear manifestation of state failure in addressing the housing problem, was less than a kilometre away from Philam Life Homes. Furthermore, the 'unruliness' and informality of Quezon City's subalterns posed a challenge to the modern urban dream for the city. This conflict manifested in villagers resisting urban change, criminal elements lurking at the city's peripheries, and rural migrants establishing informal settlements in the city centre.

Rising criminality, not just in Quezon City but also in the nearby towns, was influenced by the rapid population increase in the greater Manila area.[91] Many residents in Quezon City placed pieces of broken glass on top of the perimeter

90 On the history of Philippine architecture, see Lico 2008; Yamaguchi 2006; Zialcita and Tinio 1980. Lico (2008:388), however, notes that these place names "bore no relation or reference to the environmental character of the site they signif[ied]".

91 McCoy 2011:384.

walls surrounding their houses as protection against criminal elements.[92] In the 1950s the border areas between Quezon City and Manila were a haven for hoodlums. A graphic description published in a community newspaper reveals the capital's underside and exposes its anomalies:

> in the morning and late in the afternoon daily one cannot escape seeing dozens of pigs, dogs, chickens, rats, hundreds of lizards and cockroaches, and millions of flies, fighting among themselves over unsightly and obnoxious objects that pile up high around a stone marker at the Quezon City–Manila boundary.[93]

Other relocation projects sprung up in Quezon City, such as in Bagong Pag-asa and Kamarin. However, there were not enough basic services and employment options as there were in resettlement sites like Bago Bantay. This situation forced relocated slum dwellers to return to Manila.[94] As Laquian noted, "Ten years after the move, most of the original tenants were not in Bago Bantay anymore". Many of them sold the 'rights' to their lots. They simply pocketed the money, went back to Manila, and squatted again, richer by the experience.[95] A pattern of eviction, relocation, and return to Manila among informal settlers characterized Quezon City and 'marred' the new capital's modern façade. Manila kept on demolishing slums and transferring their inhabitants to Quezon City because elites in the old capital equally wanted to inhabit modern times.[96]

Quezon City was to serve as the "Republic's eventual realization",[97] and could be considered modern in terms of being equal to contemporary metropolitan centres around the world and in providing its ordinary citizens a taste of progress. However, it did not quite live up to President Quezon's expectations, as was most apparent in Quezon City slums, where residents occupied parts of the city designated as civic centres that were intended to convey urban grandeur: the Quezon Memorial Park site, the Diliman Quadrangle, and the University of the Philippines campus. So much for the aims of planners who had envisioned "a city without blighted areas".[98] However, a more formidable challenge from slum dwellers was their capacity to organize and take political action. A report by a special committee on housing

92 Catuca 1952.
93 *Strange goings* 1952.
94 Alcazaren, Ferrer, Icamina and Oshima 2011:64.
95 Laquian 1969:23.
96 Jocano 1980:130.
97 Cañete 2012:93.
98 *Master plan* 1949:AP-8.

convened by Malacañang in 1968 revealed that squatters had become an influential political force at the local level. The government report called them "builder squatters", for they were the ones "who worked on the many construction projects in the city, built shanties for their families, and then stayed put even after the construction work was done".[99] Apparently, the provision in the 1949 Quezon City Master Plan for public housing to be given to the estimated 10,000 labourers needed for the construction of national buildings in Quezon City was more honoured in the breach than the observance.[100] By 1980, Quezon City had not just the highest housing backlog (more than 76,000 units) among all Philippine towns and cities, including Manila (less than 52,000 units), but also the highest number of squatter families (30,046) in the Metropolitan Manila Area.[101] At this point, Constitution Hill, the centrepiece of the 1949 Master Plan, had become a mere relocation site for evicted slum dwellers in the metropolis.[102]

Conclusion

Quezon City's first half-century not only confounds the conventional distinction between colonial and post-colonial periods in Philippine history but also problematizes understandings of modernity. Despite being a symbol of post-colonial independence, Quezon City remained beholden to colonial ideologies, plans, and personnel. Examining the history of Quezon City's planning also reveals the agency of subaltern urban groups such as informal settlers. Their existence is partly a product of the continuation of colonial economic structures that kept the Philippines from industrializing, a situation that bred an army of low-income households serving as surplus labour for elite and middle-class residential projects. However, their persistence in finding their own place in the city, as demonstrated in the proliferation of informal communities in Quezon City, speaks of their capacity to act on what they saw as economically rational decisions. Modern times in Quezon City across the twentieth century were shaped by all its residents, including the poor and working classes, but it was chiefly the middle-class and elite inhabitants of its new suburbs who benefitted from the comforts of domestication and democratization.

99 Laquian 1969:218.
100 *Master plan* 1949:27.
101 *Metro Manila* 1975:23, 31.
102 *Metro Manila* 1975:49.

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CHAPTER 3

Mediated Publicness and Islamic Modernity in Indonesia

Julian Millie

> *Idjtihad* demands continual research, the confrontation of one's opinion with others, [and] the readiness to lay down one's judgement for another which has been based on stronger arguments
>
> DELIAR NOER[1]

Studies of the Islamic movement that arrived in the Netherlands Indies (colonial Indonesia) in the early twentieth century and is now variously described as modernist or reformist have correctly pointed to the movement's overlap with the other epochal reform project of the time, the Indonesian nationalist awakening.[2] The movements might well be understood as separate in critical aspects, for one was concerned with religious motivations and justifications, while the other was informed by nationalism, and for this reason, the historical literature concerning the period has frequently treated the two as separate phenomena. Nevertheless, the movements shared a common, core interest in their anti-colonial orientation. This chapter sheds new light on the overlap between them by exploring the significance to both of mediated publicness. By contextualizing the two projects within the restructuring of public spheres that was occurring during the early decades of the twentieth century, I argue that mediated publicness was bringing a similar reorientation of public awareness not just to nationalists, but to Islamic modernists also. That reorientation would of course be critical to the emergence of the Republic in 1945. The definition of *ijtihad* by one of Indonesia's leading historians, Deliar Noer

1 Noer 1973:94.

2 Key sources concerning the modernist Islamic revival in its Southeast Asian manifestations include Roff (1967), Noer (1973) and Nakamura (2012).

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(1926–2008), although published more recently, is a clear illustration of how public Islam came to reflect Muslim awareness of the public sphere. If we replace the word *ijtihad* with 'the liberal public sphere', the definition would be wholly correct for the substituted term.[3]

Theorizations of the public sphere were not a specific focus of Noer's work. Yet his understandings of Islamic concepts clearly reflect his orientation as a Muslim nationalist very concerned with Indonesian democracy, who understood that Islamic modernism had played a key role in the emergence of a new conception of the common good amongst Indonesian societies in the pre-independence period.[4] Laffan has pointed out, for example, the similarity between Noer's historiography and the analytical frame famously presented in Anderson's *Imagined communities*.[5] Similarly, his definition of *ijtihad* is striking for the way it advocates a narrow concept of publicness highly similar to Habermas's normative definition of the bourgeois public sphere.[6] The definition reflects a preference amongst Indonesian Muslim intellectuals for interpreting Islamic norms in the ethical forms associated with the public sphere. In this chapter, I reflect on the dialogical nexus between Islam and the emerging public sphere, and its implications for our understanding of Muslim modernity in Indonesia.

It is hard to imagine the emergence of modern nation states without mediated publicness.[7] When I use the term 'publicness', I mean the intangible relations established through interested witnessing: Subject A reads, watches or hears something and perceives that it is addressed to a collective of which Subject A is a member, even though Subject A is not in a direct dialogical relationship with the sender/author, even though Subject A and the sender/author might not be co-present, and even though Subject A does not know the other receivers with whom she shares membership of the public.[8] A number of mediating and communications forms have enabled this to happen. In this chapter I focus on embodied Islamic practice, but print publication has been most prominently associated with mediated publicness on a large scale, for it

3 A more commonly asserted definition for *ijtihad* explains it as a legal method for producing Islamic solutions to problems not directly resolvable through reference to the Qur'an and hadith.

4 For background on Noer's modernism, see Hadler 2008:101.

5 Laffan 2003:5.

6 Habermas 1989.

7 Useful overviews of the key sources include Schlesinger's summary (2000) of the theorizing of the relationship between nation and communication, and John B. Thompson's account (1995) of modernity and mediated publicness.

8 I am influenced here by the theorization of Warner (2002).

enabled the reproduction and circulation of information and symbolic forms to distant audiences. Many kinds of public spheres emerged out of such circulations, but from a historical perspective, national publics have proven to be the most significant. Colonized subjects responded to circulating representations of the "*kind* of imagined community that is the nation",[9] enabling them to feel they belonged to a public that would naturally evolve to take a future form as nation-state.[10]

In the early decades of the twentieth century, increasing numbers of Indies Muslims were participating in the new styles of public communication prevailing within the contemporaneous movements of Islamic modernism and Indonesian nationalism. Muslim awareness of these styles included ideas about how subjects should properly respond to the publicness they implied. In other words, Muslims began to make connections between the new mediated publicness and certain competencies and subjectivities, paying attention to what Michael Warner labelled "the attitude of the public subject".[11] The main goal of this article is to show how that attitude came to shape Islamic thought and practice. The definition of *ijtihad* by Deliar Noer is an illustrative example. Through this definition Noer is advocating for an Islamic morality not constructed out of revelation, but out of an ethical understanding of national publicness. Armando Salvatore observed the same in post-Nasserist Egypt: an emergent 'public Islam' was shaped by the *styles of reasoning* implicit in the concept of the public.[12] With reference to two examples from the 1930s, I argue that Islamic rituals should be added to the range of media and institutional innovations in which we can observe Indies Muslims arriving at a moment of public subjectivity that went beyond traditional co-presence, and which presaged the national public.

This argument is certainly not intended to replace analyses highlighting nationalism as a dominant value underpinning the anti-colonial movement of the early twentieth century. What I add here is an element that is much harder to discern: the effects of new styles of publicity that are often beyond explicit awareness of the individuals who witness them. To illustrate these effects,

9 Anderson 1983:30.

10 I do not mean in this chapter to reduce political evolutions in the region to a transformation, enabled by print capitalism, from traditional political structures to democratic ones. This is an oversimplification. Scholars have identified diverse supra-local Islamic social and political interaction in earlier forms of circulation, translation and mobility. Notable recent examples are Michael Laffan's concept (2003) of 'ecumene' and Ronit Ricci's 'Arabic cosmopolis' (2011).

11 Warner 1992.

12 Salvatore 1998.

I turn for examples to the early 1930s, which was the latter part of a longer period of turbulence, the period of the *pergerakan* or 'movement' caused by the widening uptake of new ideas about political forms for the future of the Netherlands Indies.[13] When Muslim modernists of the period urged that routine Islamic practices and concepts should project the normative aspects of the mediated public, they were arguing for something novel, and that novelty created confrontation with existing conditions. As time passed, the mediated national public would become an everyday reality, but the confrontations of the 1930s clearly reveal how mediated publicness initially created discontinuity with the past. This does not mean that the first decades of the twentieth century were the start of publicness, for a publicness based on co-presence in settings of face-to-face interaction has always been integral to Islamic life. But the mediated publicness of the early twentieth century made a substantive difference, for it brought to Islam the public subject that was soon to become the citizen subject.

My first example concerns ritual worship (*salat*), and is drawn from John Bowen's ethnographic and archival work on Islam in the Gayo region of North Sumatra. It illustrates how modernist Muslims introduced a subjectivity acceptable to mediated publicness into the performance of ritual observances, and the clash this created with existing styles. The second is about calendrical commemoration through participation in public speech, and is based on an eye-witness report by the Sundanese author and journalist Satjadibrata (1886–1970). It reveals how Muslims at calendrical celebrations were oriented to the new publicness through participation in such commemorations.

Gayo Ritual and Subjectivity

Bowen's studies of Islamic change in the Gayo highlands, located in what is now the Special Aceh Region, provide a valuable ethnographic account of Islamic diversity in an Indonesian society.[14] The Gayo are an ethnic group that has professed Islam since at least the seventeenth century, when Gayo communities were incorporated into the Acehnese sultanate. The highlands were rather isolated until economic exploitation of the region by the colonial regime commenced in the late nineteenth century. Bowen commenced his fieldwork in the late 1970s, but his analysis refers heavily to the early decades of the

13 Sources that convey the scope of the changes creating conflict within Indies society include Shiraishi (1990) and Vickers (2005).

14 Bowen 1993, 1997.

twentieth century as a critical period of change, and especially to the 1930s, when scholars returned to the region after completing programmes of study elsewhere in the Netherlands East Indies.

These scholars brought with them the critical sensibility of Islamic modernism, a global movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that sought to re-establish Islam's value and relevance for contemporary conditions.[15] This sensibility is difficult to disentangle from the nationalist awakening of the time, for both movements were cultivating a supra-ethnic, proto-Indonesian identity. In the Gayo lands, for example, modernist ideas were supported most enthusiastically by Muslims whose educational or entrepreneurial experiences outside of the Gayo Highlands had made them feel as if they belonged to an emergent 'Indonesian' society. The movements problematized many of the same issues, such as Western domination, native/Muslim subjugation, and advancement through education. The modernist action plan included changing traditional worship styles. Gayo reformers, like Muslim moderns elsewhere, advocated simpler, more accessible Islamic styles that they associated with the practice of the prophet and his companions. Gayo returnees brought with them an intention to "purify [Gayo] religious activities of non-Islamic elements".[16] This created conflict with defenders of the Gayo status quo.

One dispute to emerge revolved around the question of intention (Arabic: *niat*), and how it should figure in the utterances made during ritual worship (Arabic: *salat*). Both sides of the dispute agreed that a Muslim should perform worship with the correct intention. According to established convention in the Gayo Highlands, Muslims should verbalize this intention in Arabic at the commencement of the ritual worship. By verbalizing the *niat*, the worshipper was communicating to Allah that the worship was being undertaken for the right reasons, or so the defenders of the status quo argued. Modernists considered this expression to have no place in worship. Bowen explains a number of reasons behind their position on the utterance of the *niat*. First, there was no precedent for the statement in the practice of the Prophet (*Sunnah*). Why, modernists asked, would a Muslim do something that had no religious basis? This question points to a core principle of the global Islamic modernist movement: the only reason people continue to perform such acts is because they blindly follow the teaching of the elders, when in fact, it is an Islamic obligation

15 The arrival of Islamic modernism in the Gayo was late in comparison with other areas in Sumatra. Modernist Islamic education was already evident in nearby West Sumatra in the first decade of the twentieth century (Hadler 2008).

16 Bowen 1997:159.

to reason for one's self, and thereby arrive at the correct understanding of how to perform the prayer. Second, the modernists did not separate the intention from the action. They held that it was an error to think that an observance such as worship required an additional expression to confer it with intent. Worship is essentially performing one's duty to Allah. What kind of worship is it that does not have intent as an integral part of its practice, and that would require an additional statement of intent to make it successful? The modernists publicized their position through media strategies suitable to the context. Print literacy was not high amongst the Gayo, so the modernists circulated their ideas in a verse form (Gayo from Arabic: *saér*) that was efficacious in the oral-aural milieu. Print-literate Gayo could read these printed texts to their fellow Muslims. Public debates were another medium for spreading these ideas.

Bowen's analysis does not trace the modernists' injunctions about ritual form to mediated publicness, yet he provides all the elements for that connection to be established. The innovators taking issue with local tradition had completed study in other parts of the Indies, and were participants in the circulation of Islamic ideas through modernist networks. As a result, the expression of intention was unfolding within a 'new public sphere of Islamic discourse', in which Islam was becoming less about obtaining worldly benefits, and more about something novel: the public interest.[17] But most significantly, Bowen categorizes this disagreement as a "dispute about subjectivity".[18] Gayo Islamic practice had hitherto been highly transactional: individuals and kin groups strove to obtain worldly benefits from worship and ritual, and the efficacy requirements for achieving these outcomes, like the expression of *niat*, were satisfied in context. In other words, in Gayo tradition, Islamic authority oriented Muslims to the context of co-presence.

In contrast, the modernists placed greater importance on the interior qualities of the believer, and less on the 'social conditions surrounding the event', which modernists characterized with derogatory terms such as 'habit' and 'custom'. The *niat* was in conflict with their idealization of a Muslim as a subject able to make decisions using her own capabilities and knowledge, whose sincere intention was part of his or her interior state, and who was not reliant on the conventions prevailing in the setting. At the same time, the modernists were arguing for an Islam that was oriented to an emerging understanding of public interest. In other words, the attention of Gayo Muslims was being urged away from co-presence to the emerging public that would later become national.

17 Bowen 1993:281–8.

18 Bowen 1997:158–60.

Bowen emphasizes the novel competencies that came with the modernist orientation to publicity. For Gayo Muslims who had been educated in civil (that is not Islamic) institutions and had found jobs in the civil service,

> the most attractive elements in Islamic modernism were its view outwards, towards new modes of education, writing, and discovery, and its supraethnic, universalistic message that ties of common membership in the Muslim community superseded ties of family and village.[19]

This range of demanding human competencies and capabilities could not easily be instilled in Gayo subjects, but the *salat* could be brought into harmony with the subjectivity those competencies implied. This had the effect of relocating efficacy from the co-present situation to the emerging public sphere. The move has a reorienting effect that Deliar Noer was to replicate later with his interpretation of *ijtihad*.

I do not claim that Gayo modernists possessed a wholly novel range of competencies, and that this range of competencies heralded the arrival of the modern subject. Rather, I argue that these ideas about the proper performance of the *salat* should be understood as responses to mediated publicness that required reorientation of the Muslim subject. Worship styles were media through which modernist advocacy could be exercised. If we consider that the majority of Gayo Muslims, outside of the modernist vanguard, were print illiterate and had not studied in the educational centres of the Netherlands Indies, then the changes recommended to the *salat* might well have been their first experience of a public subjectivity that would shortly be unavoidable. In other words, advocates of Islamic modernism, through a dispute about the way to worship, were converting Gayo Muslims to the attitude of the public subject.

In fact, as things turned out, it was not necessary for a Gayo Muslim to drop the utterance of intention in order to take the attitude of the public subject. We know this because the traditionalists did maintain their verbalization of *niat*, but they also embraced the new public sphere. The Indonesian public sphere was to accommodate a structure in which Muslims could comfortably self-locate on either side of the concept of 'modernity'. Disputes such as this one established a pattern where some Muslims consciously participated in the emergent civic entity as traditionalists, affirming their continued adherence to ritual and doctrinal understandings that modernists had rejected.[20] The statement of the *niat* became a 'traditionalist emblem'

19 Bowen 1993:35.

20 Millie 2013.

by which this reactionary positioning could be expressed. The most significant moment in the public assertion of this position was the formation in 1926 of a union of Islamic leaders dedicated to the traditionalist cause (*Nahdlatul Ulama*, The Rise of the Scholars). But the individual disputes through which people understood themselves to be modern or traditional obscure the really significant change: traditionalist and modernist figures alike were now subjects in a mediated public arena that would become the national public sphere.

Publicness and the Islamic Calendar

My second case study is an eye-witness description of a calendrical Islamic celebration published in the Sundanese language in 1931. It is a doubly apt example for the current purpose. On one hand, the report was a print publication that circulated within an emerging readership at a time of significant political ferment. On the other hand, the author was an eye-witness to a communication event constituted by the co-presence of bodies gathered for the purposes of celebrating a feast of the Islamic calendar. Since the time of the Prophet the calendar has structured Islamic sociability, distinguishing certain dates as times when Muslims should gather to commemorate, supplicate and study with other members of the community. The report reveals how participation in embodied, co-present forms of Islamic communication—forms which constitute the everyday reality of Islamic life for many Indonesians—was transformed by the restructuring of the public sphere that was happening at the time.

On 27 July 1931, Raden Satjadibrata (1886–1970), a prominent journalist, editor and translator, took a tram ride from Meester Cornelis, in Batavia, to Canary Street, in the Salemba area of the same city. Satjadibrata was a member of the Sundanese ethnic group, which occupies the region of the contemporary Indonesian province of West Java. According to the census of 1930, there were 11,039,350 people residing in the Province of West Java. (At that time it included the Batavia region. Batavia, now named Jakarta, in current times has a separate administrative status from West Java). Sundanese comprised 8,275,140 of this population.[21]

Satjadibrata was employed in Batavia as an editor for *Balai Pustaka* (literally, Hall of Books), an organ established by the colonial government to provide reading materials for the indigenous populations of the Netherlands East

21 *Volkstelling* 1933:96–121.

Indies. His duties at *Balai Pustaka* included editing the Sundanese language magazine entitled *Parahiangan*.[22] He was not directly involved, it appears, in nationalist politics. We know about his activities on 27 July because of the description, written in Sundanese, that he published a month later in *Parahiangan*. On the evening in question, his destination was Batavia's landmark Consultative Building, where a calendrical celebration, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (Arabic: *maulid*), was to take place. This celebration occurs annually on the twelfth day of the month of *Rabi' al-Awwal*. This was a big celebration. One of the speakers claimed that more than 100,000 people attempted to attend the event.[23] It was organized by a committee representing a number of Islamic groups, and in Satjadibrata's words, "celebrations as impressive as this can only be found in Batavia".[24]

This particular *maulid* celebration was taking place at a time when the struggle for independence had been gaining momentum for about two decades. By the end of the 1920s, the broader independence movement had just emerged in its "clearly articulated and organized phase".[25] In the *Sumpah Pemuda* (Oath of the Youth) of 1928, young nationalists from diverse ethnicities of the Indies gathered to express a commitment to a newly conceived collective; the Indonesian nation, and to affirm that Malay, an ancient language newly renamed as 'Indonesian language', was thenceforth to be the 'language of unity'.[26] Future president Soekarno, leader of the Partai Nasional Indonesia (PNI, Indonesian National Party), one of the parties to blossom in the wake of the Islamic Association, had emerged as a catalysing figure. In 1931 he was in prison, incarcerated by a colonial government becoming increasingly wary of the growing strength of the independence movement. The speakers to whom Satjadibrata listened on that evening included important figures in that movement, and in what follows, I discuss his accounts of the speeches of two of them. The first was the Javanese H.O.S. Tjokroaminoto (1882–1934), the leader of one of the Indies' pioneer nationalist movements, the Islamic Association. He was a skilful orator who attracted large audiences across Java.[27] The second to be cited was Kasman Singodimedjo (1904–1982), a Javanese activist affiliated with the *Muhammadiyah* modernist movement, who had himself taken part in the Oath of the Youth. He would later become a member of the Committee for

22 Van den Berge (1993) has described the influence of colonial politics on the literary context of the magazine.
23 Satjadibrata 1931:519.
24 Satjadibrata 1931:519.
25 Kahin 1952:41.
26 Foulcher 2000.
27 Shiraishi 1990:53.

the Preparation of Independence (BPUPKI, Badan Penyelidik Usaha Persiapan Kemerdekaan Indonesia).

Public Islam Restructured

Judging from the report Satjadibrata wrote in *Parahiangan* for the benefit of his fellow Sundanese, it seems they knew little about the rallies the nationalist movement was holding. This was not surprising, for although the Sundanese lived in a densely populated region in which some of the Indies greatest population centres were located, they were remarkably isolated from metropolitan society: only 7% of Sundanese were literate, and less than 5% of them lived in the Province's major urban centres of Batavia, Meester Cornelis and Bandung.[28] No wonder then that the report projects a strong sense of novelty as it describes the pluralist collective that was gathering around the nationalist cause. It seems as if he was conveying strange and foreign realities for the first time in the vernacular shared by writer and reader.

Satjadibrata's report focusses at length on the audience, describing the diverse groups attending the event. He mentions that on the tram journey to the venue, he travelled in first class. He noted that the other occupants of his tramcar were Arabs. His describes another group as "our people" (Sundanese: *bangsa urang*), meaning either Sundanese or alternately members of groups indigenous to the Indies, and notes they were squashed together in third class.[29] After arriving at the venue and sitting down with his friends, three of them on two chairs, they found they were "sandwiched by our Batavian brothers" (*dihapit ku abang-abang*).[30] He also conveys the diverse social groups represented at the event: Satjadibrata observed that the evening commenced with a procession of hundreds of school children carrying torches. Mention is made of the parties combining to sponsor the event, including wealthy Arabs and Salim Basalamah, who provided the soft drinks. *Radio Holland* provided the sound equipment.

The Muslims for whom Satjadibrata was translating were being made aware of an emerging, plural public that they belonged to but had yet, for the majority at least, to witness. This was the "community in anonymity" that Anderson

28 *Volkstelling* 1933:96–100.

29 Batavia's public transport system has been identified by historians as a space that affirmed and also blurred lines of social differentiation in Batavian society (Proudfoot 2005).

30 Satjadibrata 1931:519. In Sundanese, the word *abang* refers to the males of Batavia's Malay-speaking populace (Satjadibrata 2005:35).

understands to be a trait of modern nations; a recognizable collective is conjured up out of a mass of otherwise unrelated and unknowable identities.[31] Satjadibrata is part of that conjuring through his publication. For example, his report passes on information about threats to his readers of which they might not have been aware, and which posed no danger to them in the co-present sense. Tjokroaminoto's speech had sought, Satjadibrata explains, to calm the responses of the Islamic community towards "offences against the prophet" committed not long earlier by one Hoa Kiaw from Surabaya and J.J. ten Berge. Ten Berge had earlier in 1931 published some articles offensive to Muslims in the journal of the Dutch Jesuits, *Studiën*.[32] This may have been the first knowledge Satjadibrata had of these happenings, yet it is implicit in his relay of Tjokroaminoto's speech that these were offences against a collective to which Satjadibrata and his readers, being native Muslims of the Indies, belonged.

Linguistic aspects of Satjadibrata's report point to the restructuring of public subjectivity that was taking place. Malay would become the national standard of Indonesia after its establishment in 1945, and the public would quickly accept that language as its unifying linguistic medium. But in 1931, Malay was not understood sufficiently to serve as a linguistic medium for the Sundanese. And in his Sundanese translation, the inadequacy of that language as a vehicle for describing contemporary novelties is clear. Satjadibrata explains the event's technology, for example, in a way that suggests Sundanese readers had no knowledge of it, but the Sundanese language did not help him to remedy that deficiency, especially where the sound amplification was concerned: he describes what is certainly a microphone with the English word 'loudspeaker'. He writes,

> Above the committee's table is a 'loudspeaker' (a device for making the voice louder) connected to two pieces of equipment at the right and left sides of the hall, so that the voices would be more clearly audible to those far away.[33]

Here were novelties that needed to be described, but the ancestral language was not up to the task. Malay would shortly become the formal, national standard of the Republic of Indonesia, and be accepted by all Indonesians, including the

31 Anderson 1983:28–49.

32 Steenbrink 1993:118–21.

33 Satjadibrata 1931:519. The Sundanese text is: "Dina lebah medja komiteu aja 'loudspeaker' (pakakas paranti ngabedaskeun sora) disamboengkeun kana doea parabot noe aja di sisi balandongan kentja-katoehoe, soepaja sora tambah terang kadengena ka noe djaoeh".

Sundanese, as the language of present and future. After that point, Sundanese would henceforth be one of Indonesia's many regional languages.

Ritual and Interpretation

Satjadibrata's report describes and contributes to a restructuring of the public sphere in which Islamic rituals were amongst the media through which Muslims would be oriented to the attitude of the public subject. The major thematic pre-occupation of this new publicness—the awakening of the native populations—emerged in Satjadibrata's summary of the speech delivered by the nationalist activist Kasman Singodimedjo:

> Mr. Kasman told the story of the Honoured Prophet from his birth up to when he took on the role of prophet. He was born in the time of *jahiliah* [pre-Islamic ignorance], that is to say, the time in which people exploited and scandalised each other. There was no order. The honoured prophet was treated as an enemy by the Quraish, who were very strong, but because of the intensity of his conviction, he was unharmed up to the time of his migration from Mecca to Medinah.[34]

In Kasman's reading, subjugation was the relevant element of the Prophet's biography. This theme enabled him to articulate the subjugation faced by the Muslims of the Indies in 1931. It highlighted their inferiority in political and economic wellbeing; a Muslim majority was enslaved by a Christian minority. From this position of subjugation, the solitary figure of the Prophet taking on the forces of pre-Islamic ignorance appeared as the most compelling and appropriate theme to be foregrounded at the *maulid*.[35]

What needs our attention is the way in which the political struggle becomes thematically appropriate and even dominant at the celebration of the venerable feast day. And it was not only in Batavia that Islamic celebrations were

34 Satjadibrata 1931:520.

35 Kasman, who was twice imprisoned under the Soekarno regime for subversion (Noer 1987:265–6), would repeat this analogy in more detail in his prison reflections, published after his release in 1966 by the New Order government. In the prison reflections, the analogy is applied to a different context. In a passage full of enthusiasm for the new political regime, he described Islam as an eternal *orde baru* (new order), constantly rising up against the *orde lama* (old order). According to Singodimedjo (1969:194–5), the arrival of the New Order to replace the Soekarno regime was analogous with the arrival of the Prophet Muhammad in the *jahiliah* of seventh-century Arabia.

becoming media for the forming of the future national public: this was happening across the Indies. Bowen describes a calendrical celebration held in the very same year (1931) in the Gayo region described earlier. It displayed a combination of 'the emblems and rhetoric of nationalism, religious and social reform, education, and economic progress'.[36]

The Dutch colonial officer G.J. Pijper was an eye witness at a number of *mi'raj* (the Prophet's ascension) celebrations in West Java in the years leading up to 1934. He noted that when the reform-oriented Islamic organization Muhammadiyah held a *mi'raj* celebration,

> speeches are held which, to be sure, have the *mi'raj* as their point of departure, but which apart from that have a wider importance. They frequently serve for the expression of generally religious, as well as educational, historical and apologetic considerations concerning Islam; on a few occasions, apart from the purely religious ideals, the political ideals of Islam are also touched upon.[37]

These reports project a new kind of virtuous subject. Listeners/readers were learning to become subjects whose particularity was to be bracketed in subservience to this emerging national public. The witnesses to these celebrations, held across the Indies, would put aside their particularity and be appreciative of the political discourses being represented by leaders such as Tjokroaminoto and Singodimedjo.

Independence would bring a new set of political conditions, in which Islamic celebrations would enable witnessing of further restructurings. The New Order (1967–1998) government of Soeharto, for example, used feast days to make policy statements and give publicity to its political vision. A policy speech would be delivered by the President or other minister, and a publication of the speech in print would later appear, bearing a title that expressly connected the speech to the calendrical moment on which it was given.

The publications of these speeches form a printed legacy that testifies to the efforts of the Soeharto government, which had made the heavy-handed exclusion of rivals from the political system a part of its political strategy, to use Islamic language and symbols to shore up support for its programmes. The speeches reveal two strategies for achieving this. First, the government was eager that its policies be seen as implementations of Islamic ideals and aspirations. In 1969 Soeharto joined with other national figures to commemorate the

36 Bowen 1993:100.

37 Pijper 1934:147.

feast of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension in the national mosque in Jakarta. After praying, the President delivered a speech. Just as Singodimedjo had done in 1931, Soeharto likened the Prophet's struggle to the contemporary struggle of the Indonesian people. But his speech identifies a new enemy in that struggle, the Partai Komunis Indonesia (PKI, Indonesian Communist Party).[38] Not three years earlier, the Soeharto regime had made the obliteration of the Indonesian communist movement the basis of its legitimacy. Soeharto was now using Islamic symbols to remind Indonesians of that legitimacy. Developmentalism, the defining political ideology of the period, was given similar treatment. In a policy speech delivered on the feast of the sacrifice of 1970, Soeharto emphasized that the sacrifices (Indonesian from Arabic: *korban*) that had to be made during these early stages of Indonesian economic development were in fact equivalent to the sacrifices that Abraham had been prepared to make for Allah, and which were commemorated in the feast.[39] The future, when Indonesians would reap the rewards of development, would be the time of bounty (Indonesian from Arabic: *nikmat*).

A second strategy of Soeharto's printed speeches was to promote the largesse granted by the government to Indonesian Muslim society. In the earlier of the two celebrations mentioned above, Soeharto's speech included descriptions of the sums given by the government to help Indonesians travel to Saudi Arabia for pilgrimage (Arabic: *hajj*). In the latter, Soeharto describes the sum of money collected by the government in the category of alms (Indonesian from Arabic: *zakat*).

With these strategies, these brochures do something similar to what the speakers achieved at the event attended by Satjadibrata in 1931. The messages point strongly to a sense of the national good and to the Islamic calendar as a structuring concept that provides moments of special significance for commemorating the Indonesian nation. They also reveal a political insecurity that was characteristic of the New Order period.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to add the embodied practice of Islam to the range of media in which we can observe Indies Muslims arriving at a moment of public subjectivity that went beyond traditional co-presence, and which presaged the national public. I wish to close with a reflection, enabled by the above analysis,

38 Soeharto 1969.
39 Soeharto 1970.

that sheds light on Islamic modernity in contemporary Indonesia. This reflection returns once again to Deliar Noer's definition of *ijtihad* which commenced this paper. Throughout this chapter, I have referred to that as an intervention that is *sui generis* with the two examples that form the bulk of the discussion. All three examples point to different ways in which Islamic participation and performance enable Indonesian Muslims to assume an attitude of public subjectivity. But note the differing levels of difficulty these examples imply for Indies/Indonesian Muslims hoping to do that. Mediated publicness enables difficult as well as simple forms of public Islam, and the contrast between these remains a significant opposition in the present. For example, the public Islam advocated in Deliar Noer's definition is highly inaccessible because of the capabilities it presumes. How many Indonesian Muslims are able or inclined to engage in continual research, or to evaluate arguments? In fact, how many contemporary subjects of any country are able to do this? If any individuals have acquired these capabilities, they are surely members of specialized classes such as journalists, academics and intellectuals. Because of the practical difficulty of carrying out those injunctions, and the irrelevance of those capabilities to many lives, Deliar Noer is in fact arguing for a utopian public Islam.

In contrast, when Gayo modernists advocate changes to the *salat* in the 1930s, they were proposing something very simple that could be achieved through embodied actions lying well within the power of most people. Of course, once the styles became symbols of social difference, it was not such a simple matter for a Muslim to change their *salat*. But in the early days of these disputes, one merely had to refrain from the explicit statement. This was an easy step to 'modernity' for Indies Muslims. These two options, one impossibly utopian and the other practically accessible, point to two polarities of public Islam in contemporary Indonesia. Both polarities are widely supported *and* rejected, revealing a contested range of possibilities for public Islam. The achievement of Islamic modernity through simple acts pertaining to ritual style continued to be hotly debated throughout the first decades of the post-independence period, but those disputes have now dwindled, and been replaced by concern over something equally simple: consumerist Islam. Many contemporary Indonesians turn to commodities such as clothes and accessories to achieve public piety. Yet these simple practices of public Islam, very accessible to Indonesians, attract negative commentary that questions the sincerity of those who take them up, as well as the morality of their consumption.[40]

40 Trends in commodified Islam, as well as debates around them, can be read in Jones (2010) and Fealy (2008).

There is wide support for the interpretation advocated by Deliar Noer, and specifically for the valorization of rational deliberation that sits at its core. To many, his *itjihad* implies a more 'substantive' Islamic subject than the one constructed through fashion or ritual style.[41] But this vision has had limited public uptake, partly because it is intelligible only to elites, and partly because of the internal sectarianism of Indonesia's Muslim community. Tracing these divisions to the 1930s allows us to see that both visions of how to be modern Muslims, one oriented to reflexive consumption and one oriented to public deliberation, were enabled as viable alternatives by the same onset of mediated publicness.

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41 The formalist/substantive dichotomy was used in the widely-cited analysis of Liddle (1996).

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CHAPTER 4

New Spiritual Movements, Scholars, and "Greater India" in Indonesia

Marieke Bloembergen

> No place of grace for those who avoid the face
> No time to rejoice for those who walk among noise and deny the voice.[1]

In 1933, Sutadi, a 40-year old journalist and teacher from Solo (Central Java), went—on a bicycle, and together with a friend—on a one-year pilgrimage to visit Java's old Hindu-Buddhist temple sites, mystical teachers and Islamic schools. Sutadi came from a lower-elite Javanese family, and was an educational reformer. He was also an active member of Indies and Javanese political organizations and, from 1922 to 1931, the colonial semi-parliament in Batavia, the *Volksraad* (People's Council). He had trodden the trail of spiritual seeking since at least the early 1920s. At that time, he became a member of the Theosophical Society's lodge in Solo (founded 1905), and the Javanese elites' occult spin-off of this society, *Hardopusoro* (Tied by Longing). But the 1933 pilgrimage across Java set Sutadi more strongly on that trail. Soon he became one of the leading figures of *Sumarah* (Total Surrender), the new Javanese spiritual brotherhood and meditation cult, founded in 1935–1937.[2] Roughly a decade later, in 1948, in the midst of decolonization, war and revolution, his fellow townsman Suyono Hamongdarsono (then aged 24), also joined the Theosophical Society in Solo, thereby following in the footsteps of his parents. Suyono converted to Buddhism in 1951, loosely associated with Sumarah, and in 1958 made a one-year pilgrimage to India, first to the School of Wisdom at the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Adyar and then, using Paul Brunton's *A search in secret India* (1934) as his guide, to India's sacred sites and gurus. This was ten years

1 From the poem "Ash-Wednesday" (1930), by T.S. Eliot, quoted in Lears 1981:311–2.

2 Stange 1980:70–1, 106.

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before hippies carrying a copy of Brunton's book would follow the same trail. Suyono was a welcoming host to them in Solo during the 1970s, as a guru of Javanese 'relaxed' meditation, an informant of scholars seeking to understand Javanese culture, and as mediator of the various spiritual movements that Solo had accommodated since colonial times.[3]

Sutadi and Suyono embody and connect the new spiritual associations that developed in early twentieth-century Indonesia, peaking in the colonial 1920s, in the post-colonial 1950s, and again in the 1970s, and which had local, inter-Asian and global dimensions. In this chapter, these two men and the 'sites of learning' that drew and shaped them spiritually serve as guides for exploring these connections. Their journeys also illustrate alternative forms and trajectories of modernity in Indonesia across regime changes, boundaries and aspirations of the state/nation. Actors in these networks—whether Javanese, Eurasian, Dutch, French, Indian, Singalese, Thai, English, American or otherwise—and their archives and libraries lead away from the well-trodden paths of empire and state-centred historiography. They responded to currents of cultural exchange that did not dominate the struggle for national progress or independence and subsequent historiography as exemplified by Takashi Shiraishi's (1990) influential account of popular radicalism in colonial Java. They all engaged, however, with forms of orientalism, India-centred cultural imperialism, and pan-Asianism which had their own discrete mechanisms of in- and exclusion.[4] They show engagements with alternative maps and moral geographies, and a longing for progress and improvement of the world, that thrived in colonial and post-colonial Asia and the West.

Spiritual seekers and scholars seeking to understand 'Javanese spiritual culture' are well placed in a volume that examines the experience of modern times in Southeast Asia. Max Weber's theory of modernization as a form of secularization and disenchantment has long been disputed by historians and scholars of religion, who rightly emphasize that spiritual aspirations remain an aspect of modern society.[5] More recently this has also been pointed out for Asian contexts.[6] That said, within the historiography on religion and modernity in colonial and post-colonial Asia, there is still much to explore regarding why, how and for whom spiritual organizations were formed and gained appeal. How should individual and communal practices of spiritual seeking be

3 Interviews with Ananda Suyono and Shanti, Solo, 29 and 30 June 2014, 30 January 2015. Brunton 1934. Brunton's book became a classic, was translated and reprinted in many languages and, from 1970 starting in the US, as a paperback, altogether selling over a quarter of a million copies. For a traveller's reflection on Suyono as guru, see Notzon 2014:57–117.

4 On transnational scholarly knowledge networks across decolonization, see Bloembergen 2018.

5 Turner 2014.

6 Van der Veer 2001, 2014; Kahn 2016.

understood in the specific context of colonial empires and post-colonial societies, and how might they offer insights into how people experienced, coped with or tried to influence change, or contributed to the imagination of a new society—and thus define the 'modernity' of their acts and aspirations?[7] What defines these spiritual associations as local, colonial, transnational or universal in their specific contexts?[8] Or, following Frederick Cooper, in order to understand what made spiritual seeking 'modern' or 'colonial', we need to explore practices of spiritual seeking at the very local level, and focus on what people thought was new and reformist about their seeking, why, and for whom. This will also help us to understand how and why spiritual seekers connected with each other, within and beyond state borders, and across regime changes, at local, inter-Asian and global levels.

To these ends, I partly engage with Henk Schulte Nordholt's call to move away from a nationalist-centred history of Indonesia and instead explore the dreams and ideals of indigenous, urban, lower-middle classes for understanding social change in Indonesia.[9] However, I focus on the lower Javanese elite who, while similarly urban-based, are ultimately unlike Schulte Nordholt's groups, which aspired to technical modernity and materialist consumption. Moreover, while Schulte Nordholt's analysis remains within the national borders of a modernizing, thriving Indonesia, the examples of Suyono and Sutadi show how historiographies can blind us to the important *transnational* dimension of the spiritual networks that people formed. The question is, how did these transnational spiritual networks become situated and localized in Java, and what were they about?

Theosophical Networks and Moral Geographies of 'Greater India' in Java

The Theosophical Society and local religious revival movements in the Netherlands Indies/Indonesia have, aside from a few pioneering and important studies, not yet been systematically studied in connection to each other.[10] Nor have

7 See Protschky in this volume; Haan and Kennedy 2009:11–26.

8 Cooper 2005:113–49, especially 147; McVey 1967:135–6.

9 Schulte Nordholt 2011.

10 De Tollenaere 1996; Nugraha 2011; MacDougall 2005; Brown 2004; Ramstedt 2004, 2011; Kahn 2016:143–4. In her current PhD project at Leiden University and Gadjah Mada University, Yulianti explores these connections for the Chinese Buddhist movements in late colonial Indonesia until the 1950s. Earlier, O'Malley (1980) and Van Miert (1995) showed how local Javanese elitist spiritual and cultural movements of the 1920s had other (regionalist) preoccupations than the nation or the state.

they been explored for what I argue bound them: their role in a global trend of knowledge production and dissemination of popular views on belonging to a Greater (spiritual) India, which was seen as the solution for the materialist, warmongering predicaments of the world. From the Indian poet and Nobel prize-winner Rabindranath Tagore in the 1920s, to The Beatles in the 1960s, scholars, pilgrims and spiritual seekers moving within local Asian and international networks viewed the region that is now South and Southeast Asia as 'one' civilization that was defined by Indian origins and Hindu-Buddhist spiritual characteristics, and regarded as superior to Western, Christian and Islamic civilizations.[11] The concept of a 'Greater India' encompassing South and Southeast Asia became common among scholars worldwide, who in turn inspired Indian nationalists, with legacies well beyond the 1960s.[12] These views constituted transnational 'moral geographies' of a region that came to incorporate various colonial and post-colonial states. The hierarchies implicit in these moral geographies excluded Muslims (among other groups), who had comprised the majority of Indonesia's population since at least the late sixteenth century and who, in the twentieth century, did not necessarily identify with such views of a Greater India.[13]

The appeal of the Theosophical Society in Asia and its connections to new, local and transnational religious revival movements as well as to certain political associations has been particularly well studied for British India and Ceylon/Sri Lanka.[14] Also, there is a growing number of studies on how South Asia-based movements influenced the development of Buddhism and spiritual movements in the United States.[15] Little has yet been done to connect an Indonesia-based perspective to these fields of research. Scholars of religion and/or spiritual movements on Java, on the other hand, have predominantly studied local expressions of spirituality from an Indonesian perspective.[16] In this Javacentric field, the dominant image is either of an ostensibly typical Javanese (*kejawen*) Hindu-Buddhist-Islamic syncretism,

11 Duara 2010; Frost 2010. For a critical historiography on the ideal of Asia in India, see Fischer-Tiné and Stolte 2012.

12 Bayly 2004; Fischer-Tiné and Stolte 2012; Kwa 2013; Bloembergen 2017.

13 For a more extensive discussion on transnational moral geographies, see Bloembergen 2017. On moral geographies with a communal or state-centred framing, see Smith 2000; Cresswell 2005.

14 For India and Sri Lanka, for example, see Copley 2000; Frost 2002. For Indonesia, see Kartodirdjo 1973; Tollenaere 1996; Ricklefs 2007, 2012; Ramstedt 2004.

15 This started with the rich, pioneering study of Fields 1992. See also, Seager 1995, 1999; Hackett 2012.

16 Hefner 1985; Howe 1980; Mulder 1978; Geels 1997; Stange 1980;1993; Ricklefs 2007, 2012; Howell 1990, 2005a, 2005b.

which is cast as the lingering trace of a basic, ancient Javanese religion and culture, or as something old and authentic that persists beneath a superficial layer of 'pure' Islam. This view has been partly influenced by classics like George Coedès book on the 'Indianized' states of Southeast Asia, which has outlived even the influential work of Clifford Geertz (1960) that inspired anthropologists of religion from the 1960s and 1970s onwards.[17] By contrast, this essay argues that the spiritual movements of the 1920s and 1930s on Java were not old, but new, and not exclusively or typically 'local', but inspired in part by ideas of a Greater India.

In this chapter I will thus examine why and how theosophy and other spiritual movements in Indonesia were parts of a larger, inter-Asian and global set of scholarly and spiritual knowledge networks; and how these movements trace alternative trajectories of modernity across the colonial and post-colonial periods, and thereby engaged with and contributed to what vaguely bound them in the mind or spirit: moral geographies of 'Greater India'. I argue that these movements ambiguously moved between, combined, or competed with other 'modern' moral geographies like that of the nation, for example, that were developing in this age of violent regime changes.

To move away from 'a first the West (or first India), then the Rest' vantage point, I follow a sites-centred approach. I start my analysis from the sites of ritual practice, meditation and knowledge production on Java where spiritual associations and their followers were based. These places also served as sites of encounter, knowledge exchange and dissemination.[18] They enable an exploration of the connections between the scholarly and spiritual knowledge networks of late-colonial Indonesia and the hippie trail of the 1970s that went from Amsterdam, London and Paris to Greater India.[19] This 'hippie trail', I argue, built on older Indological and theosophical knowledge networks, and provided a useful career path for quite a few scholars of Asia. To understand how, I examine practices of knowledge exchange at what I call 'sites of learning': the historical and sacred sites and landscapes of the Netherlands Indies/Indonesia, and schools, lodges, improvised places for gatherings and meditation, and private libraries in the rural areas, towns and cities of Java. These were important sites of 'modern' scholarly, archaeological, art-historical and

17 Geertz 1960; Coedès 1968.

18 With this sites-centred method, I build on my previous collaborative research project with Martijn Eickhoff, on archaeology and heritage formation in (post-)colonial Indonesia: Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2011, 2013, 2015a, 2015b. On sites in India, see Trevithick 1999, 2006; Singh 2010; Geary 2013. On port cities as sites of interaction, see Harper 1997; Harper and Amrith 2012.

19 For the Australian perspective on the hippie trail, see Sobocinska 2014a, 2014b.

spiritual knowledge production from which Indonesia's new spiritual movements profited, and to which they also contributed, from the early twentieth century until the 1980s.

Sutadi, Suyono and the Pergerakan Kebatinan in Colonial Java

As we saw, both Sutadi and Suyono, albeit in different periods, became active members of the Theosophical Society's lodge in Solo, which was founded by (among others) Suyono's parents in 1905. From 1908 the lodge officially belonged to the Netherlands Indies branch of this International Society. Sutadi also engaged with the Netherlands Indies-based educational reform movement of the 1910s and 1920s, in which the Theosophical Society had its part. Both men, moreover, maintained connections with the scholarly world concerned with Javanese culture. And both men engaged with the new, local spiritual movements *Subud* and Sumarah, formed in the mid-1930s, which attracted Western spiritual seekers in 1970s and 1980s New Order Indonesia. Among these Western seekers were anthropologists and Indonesianists whom I consulted for Sumarah's history.[20] Suyono also converted to Buddhism through the transnational networks of Buddhist revivalism which, via the Theosophical Society, had engaged with local Chinese Buddhist reform since the 1910s. Through Sutadi and Suyono, we can therefore explore continuities and change in these transnational networks and practices of Greater Indian knowledge production. We can also gauge the impact of empire, the Pacific War, the Indonesian National Revolution, and the violent regime change of 1965, on spiritual and scholarly seeking and multiple visions of Greater India, taking shape *in* an Indonesia fully engaged with 'modern times'.

An important mediator in all that follows was the Theosophical Society. This organization, which attracted Suyono's parents when they were in their twenties, was a modern, international spiritual movement which needs to be understood in order to explain the nature and reach of Greater India thinking. It was founded in New York in 1875 by the Russian Helena Blavatsky and the American Henry Olcott. By 1883 it had its headquarters in Adyar, India. Aiming for the highest spiritual wisdom through the study of all religions and ancient, preferably Indian, texts, theosophy connected spiritual seekers, scholars, and art collectors. It had branches and local lodges worldwide, including

20 Stange 1980; Howe 1980; Mulder 1978, 2005. Notzon (2014:56–138) provides a personal account (from a British language teacher) of his spiritual learning in Solo in the mid-1990s.

the Netherlands Indies.[21] There, it was embraced and appropriated by Europeans, Chinese, and a remarkable number of Javanese: to begin with, lower elites, middle-class shopkeepers, and school teachers.[22] The Indies Theosophical Society maintained clearer connections with the headquarters in Adyar than with its sister in the Netherlands. The Society suggested inclusiveness with its aim of international brotherhood, but was fiercely hierarchical in its recognition of racial differences and positioning of 'India' as the key to wisdom. Notably, it was an important catalyst for the likewise relatively new, transnational Buddhist revivalist movement developing in Asia and worldwide. Starting in Ceylon (colonial Sri Lanka), theosophical foreman Olcott and the Singalese Buddhist revivalist Anagarika Dharmapala, helped to introduce a re-invented Buddhist tradition: Waisak, the now global commemoration of Buddha's enlightenment that takes place each full moon in May, usually at ancient Buddhist sites.[23] One of the places where Waisak is still celebrated today is Borobudur in Central Java, the giant, eighth-century temple complex that was rediscovered, explored and restored under two colonial regimes, and which has had World Heritage status since 1991. Waisek has been taking place there since the late 1920s, at the initiative of the local branch of the Theosophical Society of the Netherlands Indies, in collaboration with a small group of Chinese, Javanese and European Buddhist revivalists.[24]

But the Netherlands Indies' branch of the Theosophical Society played a role in all sorts of associational initiatives, schools, and journals appearing in the Netherlands Indies in the 1920s and 1930s. Together, these can be characterized as using a concept of that time: *pergerakan kebatinan* (literally, movement of *batin* = spiritual, mystic, moral), a lively movement for progress through notions of spirituality. Plural and diverse, the movement encompassed theosophical schools, the nationalist 'wild' schools from *Taman Siswa*, and an intriguing

21 On the history of Theosophical Society in colonial Indonesia, see De Tollenaere 1996; Van Miert 1995:92–128; Nugraha 2011; Ramstedt 2011:522–39.

22 Richardus 1989. In 1930, according to the Societies own racial categorization of membership (following colonial categories), 1006 of the 2090 members were European. This was 0.5 % of the European population living in the Netherlands Indies, the highest percentage in the world in relative terms. The same year, more than half of the members were non-European: 887 Indonesians and 208 registered as "foreign orientals", amongst whom about 190 must have been Chinese (De Tollenaere 1996:107, 110). By 1939 the Society counted 28 lodges and 19 centres spread over Sumatra, Java and Bali (*Theosofie in Ned.-Indië*, April 1939).

23 Fields 1992:102.

24 Brown 2004; Ramstedt 2011; Bloembergen 2017. On Singapore, see Blackburn 2012. On heritage formation and alternative interventions at Borobudur including Waisek, see Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2015a.

range of spiritual associations and theosophical, Buddhist and *kebatinan* journals advertising for each other. The journals of these movements have been almost completely ignored in cultural-political or religious histories of colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. They raved about gurus, sites, texts and ideas of Greater India, and translated these for their readers, pupils or followers: from Blavatsky's ideas about karma and reincarnation, to the peace and spiritual lessons of Judi Krishnamurti and Rabindranath Tagore, and translations of the Bhagavad Gita on Yoga.[25]

The point here is that this local spiritual movement of the 1920s and 1930s was not old. Contrary to what studies of syncretism on Java have found—beginning with the long tradition of missionary and scholarly studies of religion in Java, influenced by Greater India classics, and the later work of Clifford Geertz—these movements were *new*, and not exclusively 'local', but partly also inspired by Greater Indian ideas. This modern *pergerakan kebatinan* is historically significant because it responded to local needs and desires for progress, and had long term legacies beyond the Dutch empire and Indonesia. It has been ignored in studies of religion and mysticism in Java, and in state-centred or nationalist-oriented colonial and post-colonial histories of Indonesia, and even in studies on transnational Buddhist revivalism, because it does not fit these narratives.

The Educational Reform Movement in Colonial and Post-Colonial Indonesia

As for the theosophically-inspired educational reform movement in colonial Indonesia, this field also deserves more research. Those studies who have paid attention to it do so mainly from the perspective of a nationalist-centred historiography.[26] From the 1910s, the Indies' Theosophical Society set up teacher training schools, and schools at elementary and intermediate levels. Limited

25 To name just a few examples, there were first the Malay language theosophical journals like *Pewarta Theosofi* published by the central lodge in (then) Semarang, from 1906; *Koemandang Theosofie* (mixed Malay-Javanese language), published in Solo, from 1921; *Persatoean Hidoep*, published in Bandung, from 1930. More broadly "*kebatinan*"-oriented were the Surabaya-based journal *Rasa. Soerat Boelanan Tersedia oentoek Kehidupan Batin*, published from 1929; *Moestika Dharma. Maandblad tentang Agama, Kebatinan dan Philosofie*, published from 1932 in Batavia by the Chinese Buddhist reformer and publisher Kwee Tek Hoey (K.T.H.); and, connected to the latter via the same K.T.H. and his publishing house Moestika: Buddhist revivalist journals like *Nama Buddhaja* (in Dutch and English), published from 1933, and *Sam Kauw Gwat Po. Orgaan dari Buddhist Association Batavia dan Menado*, published from 1933.

26 De Tollenaere 1996; Nugraha 2011:56–7.

in number, these schools provided new 'sites of learning' for theosophically-inclined teaching and knowledge dissemination, coloured by Greater Indian thinking with a Javanese twist. Dutch colonial leaders of this movement foresaw an Indies-wide system, "that would have to cover the complete range of Education, from Montessori school to University". A system, translated and led by Indonesian teachers, that would have as its fundamental aims "association [...] without distinction of race and colour", and "spiritualization or [...] the de-materialization of the world". 'The East', and particularly India, would play a key role in this process of spiritualization, as the Motherland of the Aryan race and as the source of an old culture that could stimulate new growth.[27]

As Ruth McVey and more recently Iskander Nugraha and Martin Ramstedt have remarked, there is a parallel between this explicit theosophical push in educational reform, supported by the government, and the development of the famous, much larger Taman Siswa movement, which likewise provided an alternative modernist educational reform project.[28] Set up in Yogyakarta in 1922 by Soewardi Soerjaningrat (Ki Hadjar Dewantara), the Taman Siswa movement aimed for national education too. It sought inspiration from supposedly anti-Western, aristocratic and pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist Javanese culture. Taman Siswa, in the state-centred historiography on Indonesia's political history, has been mainly associated with the nationalist movement. However, although the theosophical schools and Taman Siswa held different aims, the first supporting "association [...] without distinction of race and colour" and the latter national 'self-sufficiency' and 'independence', both found their inspiration in the same international, Eastward-looking and Asia-centred educational reform movements. Their inspiration ranged from the schools of Maria Montessori to Friedrich Fröbel, and from Rudolf Steiner to Rabindranath Tagore and his Vishva Bharati university in Shantiniketan.[29]

Some of these schools' students—some of them famous, others less well-known—may suggest how a 'theosophical modernity', one that valued a supra-local brotherhood of Asian spirituality (based on racialist ideas) above nationalist interests, influenced a generation of Indonesian men (as well as women)[30] growing up in the 1920s and 1930s who sought reform in various fields of culture and politics. For example, in the 1930s the Solo-born Ki Sarmidi

27 Maatman 1922 (translation Marieke Bloembergen).

28 McVey 1967:131; Nugraha 2011:56–7; Ramstedt 2011:531.

29 Nugraha 2011:58–60; Ramstedt 2011:531.

30 Although I follow in this essay the perspective of male leading figures, the Theosophical and Buddhist revival movements attracted a remarkable number of (Indonesian and non-Indonesian) women as well, which I will explore by example as well elsewhere. Some of the Indonesians, like Pawarti Supangat (a key person in the Indonesia-based Buddhist

Mangoensarkoro (1904–1957) gave crucial input to the development of the Taman Siswa Schools, was a pupil of the theosophical teacher training school in Batavia, read books on and was inspired by Indian ideas on education.[31] The Batak intellectual, writer and historian Sanusi Pane taught at the Goenoeng Sari teacher's training school, and became a teacher at Goenoeng Sari himself in 1926.[32] In the cultural-political journal *Timboel* (which he founded in 1927) we can find many discussions relating to the language and means of educational reform and also in his report about his pilgrimage to India in 1929.[33] A long poem inspired by that journey, as well as many other poems of Sanusi Pane, were published in the Surabaya-based *kebatinan* journal *Rasa* (sense, feeling).[34] A nationalist as well as an 'Asianist', as pointed out by Ethan Mark, Sanusi Pane saw India as the primal civilizational source of old Java's Hindu-Buddhist material culture which, to him, was the source and inspiration of the development of Indonesia's greatness.[35]

An in-depth analysis of the *kebatinan* journals and the related educational reform movement is beyond the scope of this article, but through Sutadi and Suyono we can make sense of the history of this fluid and fragmented world of modern spiritual seekers. We begin with Suyono, who was still alive in 2018 and had developed a 'site of learning' over his lifetime that connects in intriguing ways to all these alternative histories that are lost in state-centred, anti-colonial nationalist histories of modernity in Indonesia. The site reveals that being modern in (changing) colonial and post-colonial Indonesia had many facets, among them, spiritual seeking.

Visiting Suyono's House: A Site of Spiritual Learning in Central Java

When visiting Ananda Suyono, former mediator and translator for Sumarah and foreign spiritual seekers, I found in his house in Solo well-ordered book

movement) and Rajasti Sourachman, would become leading figures in the entangled (Buddhist, theosophist) organizations and in education in post-colonial Indonesia. See for a vignette-like impression, Bloembergen 2015. On what spirituality and theosophy meant and did for the English feminist movement, see Dixon 2001.

31 Nugraha 2011:58. On Mangoensarkoro's Indian educational, and theosophical inspired influence on Taman Siswa, see Surjomihardjo 1971:115–28, and 142, footnote 31.

32 Mark 2006. On the influence of theosophy on Sanusi Pane's poetry, see Foulcher 1977:53.

33 Pane 1930a, 1930b, 1930c, 1930d.

34 See in particular strophe IX–X of his serial poem "Kalki Ratoe-Adil", published between September and December 1929 in *Rasa*: Pane 1929.

35 Mark 2006.

shelves that contained titles he had been collecting since reading his first theosophical books in 1948. These included books left by students from the US and Europe who visited him between the 1970s and 1990s. They reveal Suyono's own trajectory of learning, beginning with his parents, and after he attended the *Hollandsch-Inlandsche School* (HIS, Dutch-Native School) and subsequently MULO (*Meer Uitgebreid Lager Onderwijs*, extended intermediate level education). They include Dutch-language theosophical titles originating from colonial collections, amongst them Blavatsky's *Isis unveiled* (1877) and *The secret doctrine* (1888). There were books by Paul Brunton who would become a guide for the hippie trail with his 1930s quest for gurus in 'Secret India'. There were also books on various forms of yoga, from the Bhagavad Gita-based versions of theosophical times, via Zen to Mahareshi Yogi's transcendental meditation of the 1960s and 1970s. Further, there were books on psychedelics, works about and by various Indian gurus, from Judi Krishnamurti to Sai Babah, books on Buddhism in twentieth-century Indonesia, anthropological analyses of Javanese culture, and books on and by Sumarah and Subud. There was one bookshelf with all the studies of Paul Stange on Sumarah, and there were books of new Western gurus, like the anthropologist-shamanist Carlos Castenada and the German-Canadian guru, Eckhart Tolle, who is renowned for his thought on 'realm of consciousness'. Last but not least there were books on Islam, Marxism and Communism.[36]

Libraries like these, central in my present research as sites of learning and knowledge exchange, are key for understanding the impact of theosophy, Indian educational reform ideas, and new-age spiritualism on Buddhist revivalist and spiritual reform movements in twentieth-century Indonesia. They are also the kind of documentary archives for alternative histories to those provided by empire that historians like Tim Harper urge us to explore. Equally insightful is the personal library of other figures. One is the Taman Siswa theorist Ki Sarmidi Mangkoensarkoro, mentioned above, who was consulted by the Indonesian Taman Siswa expert Surjomihardjo. Another is the Bandung-based Islamic preacher A.A. Gym, who became popular during the New Order period (1966–1998), as recently explored by the American scholar of religion, James Bourk Hoesterey.[37] The theosophical lodges in Surabaya and Solo (which are still active) and Semarang (which is in decline) also have share similar theosophical or theosophically-inspired titles to those in Suyono's library. These

36 Consultation (and photographing with permission) of Suyono's library during visits on 29 and 30 June 2014, 30 and 31 January 2015.

37 Surjomihardjo 1971:142, footnote 31. Hoesterey 2016:2–3. I thank David Kloos for pointing me to A.A. Gym's bookshelves in Hoesterey's monograph.

include the most prominent theosophical books from the colonial period, Paul Brunton's works (in Dutch and English), and works from and on Indian gurus, some published well into the 1980s.[38] Similar books are held at the Buddhist vihara *Vilamadharma* in Bandung (West Java), set up in 1958 by the Chinese-Indonesian Buddhist Ashin Jinarakhitta, whom we will briefly discuss below. The library here had a nice collection of 1970s publications on Zen and Tibetan Buddhism, among other topics.

Suyono's house in Solo is in many ways a 'site of learning' and knowledge exchange. Here Suyono hosted the foreigners who, from the early 1970s until well into the 1990s, came to Solo to study Sumarah or other Javanese styles of meditation and spirituality, leaving their own spiritual guidebooks behind to enrich his library. Thus, Suyono and Sumarah, with its base in Solo, seem a good case study for understanding the personal and site-related connections between the various local and international spiritual movements of Java in space and over time.[39]

To historically contextualize Suyono's library and house as a site of learning that connect the spiritual associations central to this chapter, we will now follow Suyono as our guide back in time. Having already outlined the transnational connections in his story, we now also need to ask, if we want to understand—following Frederick Cooper[40]—what made connections work or not: how and to what extent was Suyono, in his spiritual query, shaped or restricted by the Dutch empire or colonial situations? And what was the impact of decolonization and the violent regime change in 1965 on his formation as a spiritual guru in Solo during the 1970s?

Suyono's library, house and photograph albums retain hints of belonging to a once privileged position in the colonial empire, as does his fluent Dutch and even English (which he learned before the hippies arrived). Born and raised in the Central Javanese court town of Solo, Suyono had one grandfather with an intermediate rank (*wedono*, district head) in the indigenous structure of the colonial administration (*panggreh praja*) and the other as an administrator in the court of Solo. Both thus belonged to the intermediate layer of *priyayi* (Javanese aristocracy). Photographs in Suyono's album show Suyono and his sibling dressed in European clothes, and in another, next to daddy's car, one of the few in East Java. His father ran a batik factory

38 Visits of M. Bloembergen to the Theosophical lodges in Solo (February 2015, May 2016, March-April 2017), Semarang (February 2015), and Surabaya (April 2017). In 2016 the library of the Central lodge in Jakarta was moved to Solo as well.

39 Brown 2004 and Woodward 1989:2 have also remarked on the potential significance of research into the connections between theosophical and Javanese spiritual associations.

40 Cooper 2005:23–4, 53, 91.

in Solo and owned land near Surabaya. These ventures were so profitable that they supported Suyono's education at the exclusive Dutch-language schools, the HIS and the MULO, and after Indonesian independence, the School of Wisdom at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in India in 1958.

While Suyono, in my interviews with him, emphasized that he was mainly interested in spirituality and not in politics, he probably *also* gained authority as a respected spiritual guru in post-independence Surakarta precisely because of his heroic role in the Revolution, as mentioned in local histories. In 1948, in the midst of decolonization and civil war on Java, the 24 year-old Suyono *also* joined the Theosophical Society's lodge in Surakarta. In the same year, he became a member of the Indonesian Republican administration, in charge of finances and welfare. He was also a member of the so-called 'Brainstrust'-division, a kind of intelligence service tasked with observing, evaluating, anticipating and advising on '*keadaan umum di Kota Solo*' ('the general situation in the town of Solo'). In that heroic republican role, he was, in 1949, briefly imprisoned by the Dutch.[41] When he was in jail, his mother brought him theosophical books in the hope, as Suyono put it, that this would bring spiritual strength and independence of mind. In Suyono's self-told history and memory, jail thus became a site that connected war, revolution, and long-term spiritual seeking. [42]

Scholarly studies on the history of the Indies' Theosophical Society end in the 1930s. While its organization in Japanese-occupied Indonesia and the subsequent chaotic period of civil war and revolution is still part of my ongoing research, it seems that at least the Solo-based lodge persisted, albeit in a subdued manner and without its Dutch members, who were all interned.[43] And, as Suyono's mother's history reveals (as told by Suyono), in the minds of a generation that shaped theosophy it remained at least an option to keep on following it. Membership elsewhere in Indonesia continued as well, and theosophists played a role in the set-up of new or the revival of old spiritual submovements in the 1940s. For one example, a local group of Dutch and Javanese elite theosophists in (Clifford Geertz's) 'Modjokuto' (Pare, East Java) established a new spiritual association in 1949 (*Budi Setia*). Leading figures there initially supported the Dutch 'Federalist option', and later, in the early 1950s, aimed for 'peace in the heart and the world'. They

41 Interview with Ananda Suyono, Solo, 29 June 2014; *Perjuangan* 1995:17–8, 34, 40. He was arrested and jailed by the Dutch from May until 24 August 1949.

42 Interview with Ananda Suyono, Solo, 29 June 2014.

43 For brief local histories *Boekoe Peringatan* 1958; *Theosofi Sala* 1980.

were uneasy, as Geertz observed, about the chaos and violence in the vacuum of power and lack of security control in that period, and about a revolution they perceived as 'terror'.[44]

In 1951, Suyono got his first motor cycle. In that same year, as a citizen of the young Indonesian Republic and an active member of Indonesia's Theosophical youth organization, he converted to Buddhism. Suyono had been deeply moved by the visiting Chinese-Indonesian Buddhist, Ashin Jinarakkhita, mentioned above as founder of the Buddhist vihara in Bandung (1958). Born The Boan An in Bogor in 1923, initially formed as a theosophist, and all along much inspired by Krishnamurti, in 1951 he returned to Indonesia from his studies in chemistry in the Netherlands. In 1953, *Bante* (monk) Ashin, as he was subsequently known among Indonesian Buddhists, became the first Indonesian to be officially ordained in *theravada* tradition in Burma.[45] When Ashin visited Central Java to spread the Buddhist message during his 'Dhamma tours', as he called them,[46] Suyono accompanied him to villages in the region. In 1956, Suyono hosted another guest of the Indonesian theosophical society, this time from India, Subrahmanyam, secretary of the Theosophical Society's headquarters in Adyar. Subrahmanyam also came for the special Waisek celebration that year, commemorating the 2500th anniversary of Buddha's Enlightenment.[47] Suyono guided Subrahmanyam as a translator during his theosophical promotion tour and also took him to Java's Hindu-Buddhist sites, including Borobudur and Prambanan.

In 1958, at the invitation of the Theosophical Society, Suyono repaid the visit of Subrahmanyam with a 6-month study trip to the headquarters' school in Adyar, followed by a 6-month pilgrimage across India to see its sacred sites and gurus. Suyono visually commemorated these trajectories of learning neatly in well-ordered photograph albums, introduced by a map indicating his journey. In his own words, looking back almost 70 years later, Suyono reasoned that his various spiritual journeys, the gurus he encountered, and his own activities as a guru of relaxed meditation formed him into an independent spiritual seeker living according to the motto: 'Be, here, now'.

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44 Geertz 1960:340–2.

45 Ashin, according to his Indonesian Wikipedia site, was Java's first Buddhist Monk "since Majapahit", ordinated in Burma. See http://id.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ashin_Jinarakkhita (accessed 10 November 2017). On Ashin Jinarakkhita, see also Sang Pengasuh 1982; MacDougall 2005:91–2, 118–21; Ramstedt 2011.

46 MacDougall 2005:121.

47 *Buddha-jayanti* 1956. On that special celebration as concerned Borobudur, in the context of heritage formation, see Bloembergen and Eickhoff 2015a:92–5, 101–3.

> I learned from everyone. I tried to implement what I learned. For me it is not either Buddhism, or theosophy, or Sumarah, or Subud. I am now reading Eckhart Tolle.The interesting thing is that he is saying what I was promoting as well: 'Be, here, now', that is the philosophy. [...] I have my own meditation method.[48]

Of course, we can only assess the meaning of these words according to how Suyono *remembers*, or looks back. However, they may help complicate our understanding of the influence of certain Sanskrit scholars, Greater Indian nationalists, Anagarika Dharmapala or Tagore, who acted as mediators and missionaries of transnational scholarly and religious revivalist knowledge networks in Asia, and who helped shape moral geographies of a 'Greater India'. Given the fact that the pivotal studies on Greater-India thinking which inspired this chapter are predominantly written from an India-centred perspective,[49] Suyono's words are meaningful if we wish to also understand the impact of Greater India-thinking outside modern India's borders, but within what was perceived part of Greater India, in our case Indonesia. For despite his own travels in that world of Greater India, Suyono also went his own way, whether in India or Java. He had 'his own meditation'.

As we shall see, Suyono's trajectory of experimenting, loosely associating and spiritual seeking was typical of many others. The sites of learning that already existed in his lifetime or that emerged later—the houses of gurus, lodges, new Buddhist *viharas*, temporary halls for large gatherings, the sites of Java's sacred landscape—connected these people and anchored various trails and networks of spiritual knowledge. Next to 'sites', as Suyono's wife Shanti suggested, '*organisasi*' (organization) might be the magic word that explains the attraction of spiritual associations, giving key figures important roles in showing the path to spiritual improvement. This is how Suyono also 'loosely' joined Subud and, from the 1950s into the early 1970s, Sumarah. "I was already universal[ly]-minded. Therefore I understood the importance of these movements".[50]

Accordingly, Suyono was the person who integrated theosophy and Sumarah meditation. Students who travelled to Indonesia in the 1970s aiming to learn Sumarah meditation found Suyono by following *the* travellers' guide to Indonesia of the 1970s and 1980s, Bill Dalton's *Indonesia: A traveller's notes* and *Indonesia handbook*. Dalton directed travellers to Solo's Theosophical Lodge,

48 Interview with Ananda Suyono, Solo, 29 June 2014.

49 Bayly 2004; Kwa 2013; Duara 2010; Fischer-Tiné and Stolte 2012; Stolte 2013.

50 Interview with Ananda Suyono, Solo, 29 June 2014.

then still on Jalan Gadjah Madah, and described Sumarah as "a white magic mystical fraternity". "Spiritual groupies need not apply", and "If you're registered you may borrow books and take them back to your quarters", so Dalton explained.[51] This is partly why and how Suyono's home became an important site, connected to other Sumarah sites, for learning Sumarah meditation which, at Suyono's meditation hall, increasingly transformed into his own deviated version of 'relaxed meditation'.

Sumarah, Surrender

Sumarah is an acronym of *Sujud Marah Allah* (Devotion, Dedication, and Surrender to God), and it was in essence a meditation cult. It was formed between 1935 and 1937 as a small fraternity, or a loose network of 'spiritual seeking' friends, following the revelations of the movement's inspirer Sukinohartono, or Sukino (1897–1971).[52] Sukino was born into the lower administrative elite (his father was a village head), and both his parents were deeply spiritual. He had grown up in the surroundings of the sacred landscape of Gunung Kidul near Yogyakarta, Central Java. In the 1920s and early 1930s Sukino, in search of spiritual knowledge, explored what was by then a burgeoning spiritual 'market' in Java. He did so while advancing through the teacher training school in Yogyakarta and later on, while as a clerk at the *kraton* (palace) in Yogya, where he worked until his retirement in 1946. During that time Sukino had access to sacred sites not only in the rural areas of Gunung Kidul, but also in colonial towns. He attended 'cult practices' (Sumarah's biographer Paul Stange's words) in Yogya, and theosophically-inclined gatherings in Yogya and Semarang. And he let himself drown in the magic, Javanese spiritual world (*kejawen*) of village life in Gunung Kidul, an area where the belief in Nyai Loro Kidul, the goddess of the South Sea, was strong. There he was trained in popular forms of martial arts which also involved meditation techniques believed to develop psychic power.[53]

51 Not yet in Dalton 1974; but then in Dalton 1976:43–4, 1983:140–1, 1989:319–20. On this phenomenon, see Stange 1980:265–80, who discusses the "opening to the West" of Sumarah since the early 1970s, and visitors themselves causing a chain reaction in Yogya and Bali: "Within a few months it became known that Solo offered a door into Javanese mystical practice". On Dalton's role therein later on, see Stange 1980:244.

52 For the following biographical details on Sukino, see Stange 1980:67–70; Geels 1997:94.

53 For a nation-state framed analysis of the significance of martial arts, in particular *pencak silat*, in Indonesia, see Wilson 2015.

Paul Stange, in his biographical notes on Sukino, remarks that during his training in martial arts one experience made Sukino aware that "acquired power and magnetism" could result in "both capacity and willingness to kill", which set him on the contradictory quest for "peace and gnosis".[54] Two movements in the 1920s were formative for Sukino's spiritual trajectory. First, his ten years of engagement, from 1923, with the theosophically-inclined *priyayi* of the occult Java-wide meditation cult, Hardopusoro. The father and uncle of future president Soekarno were both members. Sukino progressed through the organization's seven levels of initiation. Second, his association with the new spiritual movement Subud, founded in 1932, around the likeminded Javanese lower elite, 'Raden Mas' Muhammed Subuh Sumohadiwidjojo (1901–1987), was also important. Subud is an acronym for *Susilah Budhi Dharma*, meaning

> to follow the will of God with help of the Divine Power that works both within and without, by way of surrendering oneself to the will of Almighty God.

Much earlier than Sumarah, it spread, in 1956, via the United Kingdom to the West.[55] Sukino, in the 1930s, was especially inspired by the healing practices of Muhammad Subuh.[56] In the end, neither of the associations with which he experimented could solve Sukino's inner disturbance and his dedication to "introspective and total surrender".[57]

Between 1935 and 1937 Sukino had a series of revelations, which later Sumarah followers interpreted as direct contact with God, and which led to the insight that he should form and lead his own spiritual brotherhood for spreading the message of the good to be derived from spiritual introspection.[58] As the Sumarah history goes, these revelations came to him in the same way that Bima encountered Dewaruci, as told in the wayang *lakon* of the same name. This was a story that also enchanted the Theosophical Society, which had the play performed in 1911 at the opening of its annual congress in Surabaya.[59] The

54 Stange 1980:84.

55 In the 1990s it had followers in about 80 countries, including the Netherlands (there since 1957. "Pak Subuh" visited the Netherlands in 1964). See: http://www.subud.nl (accessed 3 November 2015); Wieringa 2000:453; Geels 1997.

56 Stange 1980:70–82.

57 Stange 1980:84.

58 For a detailed description of Sukino's revelations, in which he encountered the archangel Gabriel, Muhammed, Jesus and his followers, and Senapati, see Stange 1980:83–96; much abbreviated in Geels 1997:94–7.

59 Van den Berge 2014:25. On "Javaanse mystiek", see Tichelaar 1977.

official history also has it that the revelation came as a reaction to Sukino's prayer about the fate of the 'Indonesian' people. This was reported by Sukino himself in the 1950s to Sumarah followers who, after the violent period of war and revolution, explicitly identified with the nationalist cause.[60] Also, in that teleological history, when the Dutch retreated from Yogya in 1949, Sukino had another revelation: on 1 July in that year, a 'celestial light' descended on his house in Yogya. Sukino interpreted the light as a sign of 'pure faith' (*iman suci*), stimulating him to pursue a clear line in his explanations and teachings,[61] thereby retrospectively reforming the past of a spiritual seeker following unclear and 'floating' trajectories.

In the late 1930s Sumarah was not much more than a small network of 'spiritual seeking friends' who to some extent fit Henk Schulte Nordholt's definition of the lower indigenous 'middle class' that supported progress, but not necessarily in the same way as Indonesia's nationalist historiography would have it.[62] Here, however, the term 'lower elites' would fit better than 'middle class'. The founders of Sumarah all had access to education, respectable positions as clerks or teachers, and gave shape to their endeavour for 'progress' or 'change' in their own idiosyncratic and sometimes contradictory ways. One of Sumarah's other leading figures of the 1930s, Sutadi, whom we met at the start of this chapter, is an interesting final example, embodying all the complexities and contradictions of what we may consider a spiritual trajectory of 'modernity' in colonial Java during the 1930s.

The Solo-born Sutadi (1893–1958) is, next to Sukino and Suhardo,[63] considered one of the three inspirational founders of Sumarah. He was the son of a somewhat higher-ranked family than Sukino and Suhardo. His father worked for the kraton of Solo, managing its estates in the villages around Tegalgondo. Sutadi liked to wear 'modern Western clothing', even in the very traditional context (and to the annoyance) of the Solo kraton. Like Suyono later on, Sutadi personally connected to many of the spiritual networks in 1930s Java, but he also associated with politically-oriented parties like the Solo branches of the rather radical, mixed Indies'-Indonesian *Insulinde*, the Javanese elite's 'regionalist' *Boedi Oetomo* and, during and immediately after the Revolution, the *Partai Nasional Indonesia* (PNI). He combined all this with quite a successful career as a journalist-editor for Sarekat Islam's periodical *Neratja* (Batavia),

60 Stange 1980, 1993:221

61 Geels 1997:96.

62 Schulte Nordholt 2011.

63 Born in Bojolali in 1901, he attended the teacher training school in Salatiga and became a clerk for various Chinese business entrepreneurs (Stange 1980).

Darmo Kondo (Surakarta), *Matahari* (Semarang) and *Pemandangan* (Jakarta). He was also a teacher at the Taman Siswa school in Solo. As mentioned in the introduction to this essay, he was head of the teacher's association *Perkumpulan Guru Bantu* and served as an elected member of the *Volksraad* (People's Council, founded 1918) from 1922 to 1931. Although often referred to as a proto-parliament, its function was restricted to advising the colonial government. Sutadi also worked with the Javanese epigrapher and member of the Java Buddhist association, Poerbatjaraka, for the latter's journal, *Kalawarti Basa Jawi.* A supporter of the Japanese regime—Sutadi urged *pemuda* (young fighters) to join Japan's military volunteer's corps, *Peta* (Pembela Tanah Air, Defenders of the Homeland, founded 1943) as preparation for a national Indonesian army—Sutadi, like Suyono, ended up in Solo's Republican administration and remained a PNI member in the newly independent Indonesian Republic during the 1950s.[64]

Like Sumarah's other founding fathers Sukino and Suhardo, in the 1920s Sutadi had been a member of Hardopusoro, but he was also active in the Solo-based Theosophical Society. Throughout his public career he sought spiritual balance, although that 'organization' and membership in themselves were, as in the case of Freemasonry, also good for connections.[65] Sutadi's one-year pilgrimage across Java in 1933, mentioned above, during which he visited Hindu-Buddhist temple sites, mystical leaders and *pesantren* (Islamic schools) by bicycle, apparently set him more strongly on his spiritual trajectory. Via a mutual friend (with whom he did his bicycle pilgrimage) he met Sukino, who by then had had his revelations and begun 'communicating' his message. Thus, Sutadi entered the official Sumarah history, in which he figures as a 'chosen' leader who needed to be convinced to play that role by the more streetwise, lower-ranked Suhardo. But this did not keep him from continuing his public nationalist role during the Revolution, in which he emphasized the importance of spiritual power, organized 'intensive spiritual retreats' for *pemuda*, and blessed the guerilla forces preparing for battle using Sumarah techniques of initiation. At the same time he was active in Sumarah's organization, planning conferences and instructing members to meditate daily, not only for self-purification but also for collective commitment to the Revolution.[66]

For Sumarah, the period of war and revolution seemed to have been crucial for formalizing and strengthening its organization, and for the growth of its

64 Stange 1980:106, 113–6, 1993:224–6; Shiraishi 1990:138, 143–5.

65 On the opportunities and connections that membership of Freemasonry provided to Dutch and Javanese elites in the 1920s, see Van den Berge 2014:64.

66 Stange 1993:227.

membership from around 500 during the Japanese occupation to more than 3000 in 1950.[67] In the context of the various regime changes of the 1940s, Sukino and Sutadi, the first-generation protagonists of the Sumarah movement, first supported the Japanese regime and then, during the Revolution, stimulated *laskar* groups (militia) during the bloody fights against Dutch as well as fellow Indonesians in East and Central Java during the Madiun Affair (1948). After 1950 a new, no longer exclusively elitist generation took over under the direction of a medical doctor from Yogyakarta, Surono Prodjohusono. After that the organization and its meditation practices were formalized, now with various stages of initiation.[68] From then on, Sumarah held Indonesia-wide congresses at which minutes were kept, and formulated a multilingual (Javanese, Indonesian and English) constitution, as Clifford Geertz experienced during his research on 'the' religion of Java in East Java during the 1950s.[69] This strengthening of the organization, and the appearance of an official Sumarah history in 1980—in the framework of the New Order Policy to inventorize all *kebatinan* (Javanese spiritual) movements, including the Theosophical Society, and rank them as *kepercayaan* (a belief, not an official religion)—has been influential in the portrayal of Sumarah before the war.[70]

From Colonial Spiritual Modernity to the Post-Colonial Hippie Trail

In his "Modernity and cultural citizenship" (2011), Schulte Nordholt has called for historians to move away from a state- and nationalist-centred history of Indonesia, and to look instead at the indigenous, urban, (lower) middle classes' their aspirations for and consumption of modernity as a partial explanation for the functioning and maintenance of the colonial state.[71] The Indonesian consumers of the new spiritualism that I have discussed in this chapter were

67 Stange 1993:221; *Sumarah* 1980.

68 Geertz (1960:343–4), for his *Religion of Java*, briefly explored an East Javanese group of Sumarah during the 1950s, typifying it as one of the "most highly organized" of the "Mystical sects", and "anti-intellectual" (in contrast to theosophy or Budi Setia). Geertz also consulted "the constitution" of Sumarah which was then, already, printed in three languages: Javanese, Indonesian and English.

69 Geertz 1960:343–4; Geels 1997:96.

70 *Sumarah* 1980. On the repressive and at the same time stimulating impact of the New Order regime change (after the pre-empted coup of 1965 and subsequent mass killings of presumed communists) on *kebatinan* movements in Java, see De Jong 1973:10–2; Ricklefs 2012:132–7; Howell 2005a, 2005b.

71 Schulte Nordholt 2011:437–8.

relatively few in number but fit this model, except that many also came from rural areas, and for the leading figures the term 'lower elite' seems more appropriate than 'middle class'. In other ways, they fit the description in the kinds of education they had access to and the jobs they subsequently found, as clerks, teachers, journalists, but also famous artists and intellectuals. However, although the Indonesian spiritual protagonists in my chapter may have supported, whether passively or very actively, successive regimes in Indonesia, to study them mainly in order to explain the role of 'other' modernities in sustaining the state would not do them justice. For then we would miss the chance to understand how, why and with what impact on intellectual developments they interacted with supra-local, inter-Asian and international networks of like-minded seekers. Nor would such an approach do full justice to an understanding of how their daily engagements with the 'spiritual' may have driven 'modern' aspirations alternative to (perhaps even in conflict with) those of the state and the nation.

It was in my efforts to find connections from the 1920s to 1950s between the international theosophical movements, new Javanese spiritual movements, and spiritual seekers coming from Europe and America later, during the 1960s and 1970s, that I learned of Sumarah meditation practices in Bill Dalton's famous 1973 book, *Indonesia: A traveller's notes*. This later became the 'bible' of backpackers and scholars as the *Indonesia handbook*. If tourists wanted to learn about Sumarah meditation practices, Dalton still advised in the 1983 edition, they should contact Suyono. In subsequent editions he broadened the spectrum of Solo-based meditation courses, including those provided by the Theosophical Society. Insightful for understanding continuing connections, the local theosophical lodge in Solo later became a contact address for Sumarah.[72] I, like Dalton, also consulted the 1980s PhD theses by historian Paul Stange and anthropologist David Gordon Howe. These works are not only sources for the history of the Sumarah movement itself, but also relevant for understanding connections to the hippie trail and related international engagements with the spiritual 'market' in Solo during the 1970s.[73] The Indonesia-born American Stange, for example, besides being a PhD student from the University of Wisconsin, was also one of the foreigners seeking spiritual meaning himself. For his PhD thesis, he explicitly tried to combine

72 Dalton 1983:140–1, 1989:329–30.

73 Stange 1980; Howe 1980. Both describe the scene and group of Westerners coming to Solo for the study of Sumarah or other forms of Javanese meditation as "a common thing to do" since the late 1960s, via recommendations by others. For Sumarah, see also Geels 1997:93. On Sumarah in the late 1960s, early 1970s, with his general interest "Javanese mysticism" and "*kebatinan*", see also Mulder 1978, 2005:40, 47–9.

his personal spiritual and academic explorations of Javanese mysticism, which also underpinned the anthropological method he defended: employing participant observation ('practice') and scholarly analysis ('research') to understand mysticism.[74]

> Mysticism itself offers only pathways of light, the study of it just shadows. But even shadows have meaning—they imply the existence of light and betray the shapes of intervening forms',

as he explained in his two-pronged approach to the topic.[75] Stange ended up in Solo, spent long meditation sessions in the house of Suyono (by then, Ananda Suyono), and became, along with other foreigners, a follower and proponent of Sumarah.[76] Stange himself would also become a guide and sometimes translator for the travellers and tourists seeking to learn Javanese meditation in Solo, and a mediator who explained to suspicious Indonesian parties what these 'hippies' were looking for.[77]

Anthropologist David Gordon Howe, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, also became a practitioner of Sumarah, leading weekly meditation meetings during the last half-year of his research. Howe believed Sumarah meditation practices and world views provided perfect insight in Asian as opposed to Western ways of thinking. He referred to Sumarah as "a form of Javanese mystic psychology", arguing also that he, by way of his ethnographic queries concerning the movement, became for the Sumarah leaders "part of the process of testing and refining their theory and practice". Explaining his participant-observer approach and his decision to describe the movement from the inside, Howe stated: "I feel that they have a lot to say and that they say it very well. Their system offers a profound contrast to Western thought".[78] Thereby Howe provided the perfect example of the kind of scholarly and spiritual knowledge exchange that together helped reshape

74 Stange 1980:1, 4, 19.

75 Stange 1980:6.

76 For a report from the inside on Sumarah as worldview and lifestyle, written for an international public, see Romano 1999, 2004, 2013 (an Italian long time practisioner's study of Sumarah as worldview and lifestyle, translated, from the Italian, in German and English). Stange, interestingly, provided an updated analysis of Sumarah going back to his PhD thesis, in Indonesian, for Indonesians: Stange 2009.

77 Stange 1980:422. For Westerners explaining the phenomenon of the 'hippies' in Indonesia, and their interest in Javanese spirituality, see Stange 1973; Mulder 2005:163 (on hippies), 213 (explaining the concept 'hippie').

78 Howe 1980:vi, ix–x.

ongoing spiritual trajectories of a modern kind, that made spiritual seekers and scholars identify with moral geographies of an imaginary, transnational, Greater spiritual Asian civilization, echoing Greater India, that included Indonesia.

From the perspective of historical knowledge production, this post-war generation of American scholars (particularly Stange), because of their predominant interest in Sumarah's ways to spirituality (and not politics), initially did not become trapped in the revolutionary and nationalist 'chains' of Indonesian history-writing.[79] In his unpublished PhD thesis, Stange gave a fluid and (sometimes frustratingly) vague picture of the aims of the 'seeking' founders of Sumarah in the 1930s and 1940s in which the Indonesian nation was out of view, a perspective which differs from his essay for the *Festschrift* for John Smail on 'local' histories. In that work the founders of Sumarah came to play local, heroic (and violent) roles in the Revolution.[80] It may be precisely the fluidity and experimentation of Indonesian, Chinese, Dutch and other spiritual seekers in the colonial Indies of the 1920s and 1930s that defines the 'modern' of their quest. They interacted or experimented independently, in shifting and partly overlapping associations with multiple spiritual inclinations and in changing hierarchical relations. And they did so while being educated (and sometimes having taught) at various reformist educational institutions. If we can see their actions as a form of questioning their times and the states (of mind) they found themselves in, and consider their solutions as 'therapeutic', then we start moving away from the nation-state as the primordial agent of reform in the mid-twentieth century.

Within imperial and Indonesian national historical studies, spiritual seekers, scholars, and hippie-scholars of empire are never taken seriously in their own right. Rather, they figure as deviations, at worst 'vague' or 'muddled', or as tools—a "bus stop", as one historian called it[81]—for achieving nationalist aspirations. However, they need to be seen as protagonists with an active role in, and impact on, moral geographies that alternate with that of the nation state. The figures whom I have examined in this chapter shared ideas and aspirations that connected to international networks of likeminded people, and that related to a larger, loftier space than the one bounded by empire or the nation state: the world of Greater India. This moral geography was not uniform, but had many centres, and different forms depending on the perspectives of their

79 Raben 2009:89.
80 Compare Stange 1980, chapters 3 and 4, with Stange 1993.
81 Van Miert 1995:104.

advocates: it entailed religious arts, ancient texts, and connected to modern enquiries after spirituality and moral enlightenment, all as a means to improve the world. These moral geographies of Greater India were, in turn, influenced by imperial dynamics of power, but also activated a politics of difference and exclusion in transnational Asia, and worldwide, that we can still recognize today, and which requires further scrutiny.

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CHAPTER 5

Picasso in the Tropics

European Modern Painting in Indonesia, 1920–1957

Tom van den Berge

> Je rêve parfois de ce que diront de nous les historiens futurs. Une phrase leur suffira pour l'homme moderne: il forniquait et lisait des journaux. Après cette forte définition, le sujet sera, si j'ose dire, épuisé.[1]
>
> ALBERT CAMUS, *LA CHUTE*

Introduction

In May 1938 two original Pablo Picasso paintings were on display at the exhibition of European modern art in Batavia. The paintings were part of the Fourth Regnault Collection. Pierre Alexandre Regnault was a Dutch entrepreneur and art collector. He owned thriving paint factories in Surabaya, Batavia, Semarang, and Singapore. The successful entrepreneur was a man with a mission: the display of his huge and important collection of modern paintings was to become "a landmark in the Indies cultural history".[2] Between 1935 and 1940 Regnault gave his collection five times on loan to the Museum of the *Bataviasche Kunstkring* (Batavia Art Society). Paintings by Picasso, Chagall, Van Dongen, Van Gogh, and Campigli, etchings and lithographs by Ensor, Derain, Kollwitz, and Kandinsky were shipped to the Netherlands Indies. The collection and the museum were unequalled in the colonial world, and could easily compete with collections and museums in Europe's imperial capitals. Regnault might have had a mission and the museum might have been a pioneer, but how did the

1 "I sometimes think of what future historians will say of us. A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers. After that vigorous definition, the subject will be, if I may say so, exhausted." (Camus 1956.)

2 De Loos-Haaxman 1968:109; Spanjaard 1998:61.

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colony react to modern art? This chapter discusses how Dutch and Indonesians in late colonial and post-colonial Indonesia experienced and described European modern painting.

The 1938 exhibition in Batavia was opened in the presence of the Governor General, who was honorary president of the Batavia Art Society, and other dignitaries. The majority of the visitors were Dutch, but at least one Indonesian must have come face to face with the Picasso canvases: Sindudarsono Sudjojono,[3] the man who in October 1938 founded the Persatuan Ahli Gambar Indonesia (Persagi, Association of Indonesian Artists) and who later would be called the father of Indonesian painting. Generally there was a distance between the Batavia Art Society and the members of Persagi. Initially the Society forbade Sudjojono and Persagi members from displaying their paintings in the museum, but in May 1941 the Indonesian painters had their first exhibition in the Indies' most prestigious venue for modern art. Nine years later, in an independent Indonesia, President Soekarno refused Sudjojono's request to organize an exhibition of original Picasso, Braque and Matisse paintings. This chapter is interested in the way colonial and post-colonial hierarchies influenced the appreciation of European modern painting in order to examine how people experienced and shaped 'the modern' across regime changes in Indonesia from the 1920s to the 1960s.

Following Frederick Cooper—"[scholars] should listen to what is being said in the world. If modernity is what they hear, they should ask how it is being used and why"[4]—this chapter's ambition is to hear what men and women in Indonesia were saying if and when they talked about European modern painting from colonial to post-colonial times. Who then are the people this chapter listens to? It listens to art critics of Dutch-language newspapers that were published in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. It listens to the voices that emerged from 1920, the year Picasso was mentioned for the first time in the papers, until 1957, the year the last Dutch papers appeared in Indonesia. How did art critics use the term 'modern' in the papers? And how did they judge Indonesian modern painting that was exhibited alongside European modern painting?

In colonial Indonesia a relatively large number of newspapers were published. In his unparalleled 'history of the Indies-Netherlands press' in two bulky volumes, the Dutch historian Gerard Termorshuizen calculates that, in 1905, 20 Dutch-language newspapers were published for a European population of over 80,000. Although in 1942 the same number was published for a European

3 De Loos-Haaxman 1968:127; Spanjaard 1998:95.

4 Cooper 2005:115.

population of over 300,000, between 1905 and 1942 dozens more were founded and went down. Statistics on circulation and readership are hard to come by. Termorshuizen estimates that in 1920 the newspapers must have sold 45,000 copies per day, and in 1940 they must have sold 80,000. In that year, the Dutch-language papers had 20,000 Indonesian and Chinese subscribers.[5] These may be rough estimates, but one thing Termorshuizen demonstrates convincingly in his exhaustive study: the Dutch-language press in colonial Indonesia was maker and mouthpiece of public opinion.

In this chapter the key word is 'modern', the key phrases are 'modern art' and 'modern painting'. Research on words and phrases can only efficiently be done by using digitized newspapers that are available and searchable on the Internet. Most Dutch-language newspapers in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia have been digitized and have been made searchable. For almost all Indonesian-language newspapers of the period, however, that is not the case. Only the Indonesian-language newspapers that were published between 1940 and 1946 have been digitized by the Amsterdam-based Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide Studies (NIOD). Unfortunately, during the research period these papers were not online due to copyright reasons. Instead, this research has made use of only one Indonesian-language journal, *Mimbar Indonesia* that first appeared in 1947.

In the newspapers of this period the nouns 'state', 'colony', 'administration', and 'democracy' were not frequently preceded by the adjective 'modern'. Instead, the nouns which occur most often after the adjective 'modern' are 'times', 'society', 'man', 'woman' and, of course, 'art'. How and why was this vague, misleading and unhistorical term 'modern' used in the Dutch-language newspapers? Did the term imply progress and virtue, did it claim superiority over the premodern and traditional?[6]

Modern

"Advertising was as necessary to a modern business man as raw material". This statement by Harold Mackintosh, the British toffee magnate, was quoted by *De Sumatra Post* in May 1922.[7] Modern the businessmen in the Netherlands Indies were. They used the word 'modern' in their advertisements more than the journalists used it in their articles. In 1920 the word 'modern' occurs in

5 Termorshuizen 2011:76–83.
6 Thongchai Winichakul 1994:19.
7 *De Sumatra Post*, 12-05-1922.

newspapers 644 times in advertisements and 286 times in articles. In 1920 "The steamers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company had the most modern equipment, including all lower berths and large, comfortable state-rooms".[8] In 1930 the word occurs in newspapers 1574 times in advertisements and 1094 times in articles. In that year the Willys-Knight Great Six is a sensation. The car's beauty expressed the supreme mastery of modern design.[9] In 1940 the word 'modern' seems to be on the wane in newspapers. It occurs 874 times in advertisements, 892 times in articles. In 1940 the Savoy Homann Hotel in Bandung, which had been opened the year before, was magnificent, beautiful, and especially modern. "Book in time".[10] In 1950 the word 'modern' occurs 278 times in newspapers advertisements and 265 times in articles, and in 1957, the last year Dutch-language newspapers appeared in Indonesia, the word 'modern' occurs 300 times in advertisements and 143 times in an article. A. Kasoem advertised his shops in Bandung, Jakarta, Yogya and Solo like this: "*Perusahaan katjamata jang paling modern dan terbesar di Indonesia*", Indonesia's most modern and biggest optician.[11] In modern times everyone paid tribute to the "mistress of modern society": advertising.[12]

Modern times were merciless, though.[13] In the 1930s newspapers modern times were characterized by an unlimited lust for power. This lust was manifest in states as dictatorships. It was manifest in state relations as imperialism. It was manifest in personal life as self-control. The modern man, an article in *De Sumatra Post* stated, loathed weakness. He suppressed his feelings, bottled up his emotions, never giving himself away.[14] In the late-colonial period the government of the Dutch East Indies, however, was quoted as saying that the colony—that is, its indigenous population—was not "at the dawn of modern times" at all.[15] Father Time was a white man. Modern times had a white pace. But as *De Locomotief* recorded with surprise, when World War Two came to Papua many Papuans climbed out of the 'Stone Age' into modern times. They turned out to be reliable drivers and operators, fine sailors and soldiers. In the midst of violence the primitive Papua stepped with incredible ease into the modern world.[16] Modern times devoured everyone who did not. Just before the

8 *De Sumatra Post*, 05-01-1920.
9 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 07-01-1930.
10 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 07-03-1940.
11 *Algemeen Indisch Dagblad* (*AID*), *De Preangerbode*, 19-10-1957.
12 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 28-09-1929.
13 *De Sumatra Post*, 17-12-1923.
14 *De Sumatra Post*, 06-05-1939.
15 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 20-02-1922.
16 *De Locomotief*, 02-12-1947.

first Dutch military action during the Indonesian War of Independence, in 1947, General Simon Hendrik Spoor, Chief of Staff of the Royal Netherlands Indies Army and the Royal Dutch Army in the Indies, stated that a supremo who had a pure military orientation was unthinkable in modern times.[17] Modern times demanded supermen. At the Indonesian Cultural Congress in 1950 the Sumatran writer Sutan Takdir Alisjahbana stated that the national and cultural unity Indonesian leaders had proclaimed was not a legacy of Majapahit, Mataram, or another period in Indonesia's history, but was a result of Western influence and a product of modern times.[18] Modern times were a Western invention.

Modern society was conceived of in terms of secularization, materialism, sensualism, and decadence. Jazz, dance, cinema and salacious literature stimulated the desires leading to degradation and lawlessness.[19] J.O. Fernhout, a Reformed minister in Bandung, thundered against the scourge of modern society: modern dance. Modern dance was intended to titillate the senses that provoked transgression of the tenth commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife". For Christians, taking part in the Charleston was deemed illicit by the minister.[20] In a lecture in 1938 Father Borromaeus de Greeve, a well-known orator in his day, summarized the evils of modern society: a spirit of freedom and the denial of church and state authority.[21] One year later Abdoel Karim, president of the Studenten Islam Studieclub, stated that irreligiousness in modern society was the result of urbanization and the pursuit of worldly goods.[22] One year before he died in impoverished circumstances, in 1950, the Javanese poet and writer Noto Soeroto listed in the *Java-Bode* the characteristics of modern society during the Cold War: "struggle of opposite interests, competition, abandonment and bottomless isolation of the individual". For Noto Soeroto modern society had only one choice, between the atom bomb and the doctrine of love.[23]

Modern man, in the newspapers of the 1920s, had lost his balance.[24] He moved away from family and religion.[25] In 1922 the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* published the short prayer of a modern man whose plane is crashing, "O Lord—if there is a Lord—save my soul—if I have one".[26] Modern man did not

17 *Het Dagblad*, 06-06-1947.
18 *Java-Bode*, 08-08-1950.
19 *De Sumatra Post*, 18-01-1930.
20 *De Indische Courant*, 29-10-1929.
21 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 06-10-1938.
22 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 14-10-1939.
23 *Java-Bode*, 07-01-1950.
24 *De Sumatra Post*, 03-09-1925.
25 *De Sumatra Post*, 12-04-1927.
26 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 05-09-1922.

want to live according to rules and wished to take his life in his own hands.[27] In the 1940s he was still characterized as 'a drifter'.[28] He was restless[29] and he was what he was, a smoker.[30] In the newspapers of the 1950s modern man was 'insecure', 'suffered agonies', and was 'afraid of silence'. Modern man had made progress in science and knew 'the price of everything and the value of nothing'. This, the *Java-Bode* stated, was one of modern man's most tragic weaknesses.[31] Perhaps poets had the right answer to who modern man was. In September 1922 the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* published the answers some British and American poets gave to the question, was poetry necessary to modern man? "No", poet and playwright Clifford Bax answered, "modern man is living a life where he neither needs fresh air nor poetry". "No", T.S. Eliot and J.G. Fletcher answered. "No", Ezra Pound answered, "no more than modern man is a necessity". And the English poet F.S. Flint answered: "Man is the same as ten thousand years ago and poetry has been one of his necessities ever since. There is no such thing as modern man".[32]

Was there such thing as modern woman? In the newspapers the adjective 'modern' was attached so no more often than to the noun 'woman'. The change in women's fashion and morals were revolutionary. The modern woman rode a bike or drove a car. She was not eager to marry, and when she was married and had children she left her offspring in the care of her husband. In the 1920s the modern woman was called a flapper. The *Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* was horrified: the flapper had "bobbed hair, an Eton collar, eccentric glasses, a cigarette in her mouth, and she probably was clean-shaven. Brrr!"[33] The modern woman of the 1930s could not care less. She was keen on sports and participated in horse races, archery games, and sailing matches.[34] It is striking that in the 1945 and 1946 newspapers 'modern woman' is not mentioned, and that in the 1956 and 1957 newspapers 'modern woman' only features in advertisements. For example, in "The I Can Do Series. Practical handbooks [...]. Every woman is in raptures over it. I can do it myself. I can do needlework. I can do the housekeeping". On sale at Vorkink booksellers, Djalan Asia-Afrika 54, Bandung.[35] One of the few post-war articles on women's emancipation was

27 *De Sumatra Post*, 17-05-1927.
28 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 30-12-1939; *De Indische Courant*, 20-01-1940.
29 *De Sumatra Post*, 17-06-1939.
30 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 27-04-1941.
31 *Java-Bode*, 12-04-1952.
32 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 02-09-1922.
33 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indie*, 04-05-1925.
34 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 25-06-1932, 21-11-1932, 09-09-1933.
35 AID, *De Preangerbode*, 29-01-1957.

published by *AID, De Preangerbode* of 21 September 1955. "The gentle sex", the headline read, "has an unlimited choice of career options". In the column next to it one of the headlines read, however, "Royal Netherlands Football Association is against ladies' football". The Association announced that its clubs were not allowed to throw their pitches open to ladies' football matches.[36] Modern woman had a long way to go.

Modern Art

After the Great War, the editor of the *Indische Courant* stated in 1927, a new kind of man had come into existence: a modern man, but not necessarily a better man. Times had changed and man's mentality and morality, man's views and taste had changed with them. Modern man was efficient, made up his mind quickly, went straight for his goal, and never had a moment's peace. Consequently, modern art had become condensed expression. Down with symphonies! Down with ornamentation! Down with sentimentality! Down with theory! Down with beauty! Long live primitive instincts! And the Great War, according to the *Courant*, was to blame. His gruelling labour, his restlessness and his insecurity exhausted modern man. Jazz and modern dance were symbols of the post-war rhythm of life. Modern man's anger and frenzy were released in primal rhythms. "How did people in the Indies react to this phenomenon of primitivism?", the editor asked his readers. And his answer was: "Like [the] far-away Indies reacted to everything: slowly and with the lapse of time". The Europeans in the East might become disturbed by the commotion in the West, the masses in the East did not. [37]

Modern painting, according to the Eurasian journalist, novelist and playwright Hans van de Wall (pseudonym Victor Ido) in 1929,[38] could be reduced to 'Man is Life'. For Van de Wall this implied: If the war had had an adverse effect on modern man's mentality and morality, then the war had had an adverse effect on modern man's art and culture. And it implied for him: if the 'Spirit of the Age' was the cause of desecration and mutilation of the 'Ideal', then nobody was forced to accept and follow the 'Spirit of the Age'. "Was not communism a product of the Spirit of the Age?", Van de Wall asked rhetorically. Which implied, if we combat communism as a disruption of state and society, then we should reject 'defeatist painting' as a disruption of art and culture. What did

36 *AID, De Preangerbode*, 21-09-1955.
37 *De Indische Courant*, 24-09-1927.
38 Nieuwenhuys 1972:297–301.

'modern' mean anyway, Van de Wall asked? Modern was a 'coincidental term' to characterize a cultural period. What is modern today is out of date tomorrow, only 'true Beauty' was eternal.[39] 'True Beauty' had nothing to do with the 'Spirit of the Age', let alone with modern painting.

In 1920 C.P. van Rossem in the Batavian newspaper *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* alerted future colonials on furlough to "the many disconcerting symptoms" they would be confronted with in the motherland, cubism being one of them. Cubism was a manifestation of "cerebral unrest", a restless search for moral support. The ultra-modern painter, Van Rossem warned his readers, was influenced by "modish cubism from Bolshevik Russia".[40] Cubism, the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* in 1929 stated bluntly, had no aesthetic value.[41] According to the paper's Paris correspondent, cubism was an "intolerable extravagancy".[42] *Het Nieuws van den Dag* in 1938 was not against cubism—"for many the height of modern painting"—but preferred the sweeter canvases of Ernst Dezentjé with their peaceful paddy fields and captivating cloudscapes.[43] Surprisingly, seven months later the paper published a letter from a Brussels correspondent, stating that cubism had saved painting from its decay. Cubism repudiated "mood" and returned to the "essential task" of painting: the expression of thoughts and feelings by a meaningful play of colours and forms. For cubists the painting was what it always had been: a balance of volumes. In retrospect cubism had been an essential step in the development of the art of painting. The ignorant masses had muttered at cubism, but cubism turned out to be a blessing.[44]

Surrealism raised even more anger and aggression than cubism. The Paris correspondent of the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, who in 1928 visited an exhibition of surrealist paintings in the Galerie de Beaux-Arts, spoke of them as examples of infantilism and senility. These painters had abandoned themselves to craze, rage, and strangeness. Their manifestations of the human mind, as the correspondent called the paintings, would have been banned in dictatorially governed countries, even in the Soviet Union, although many surrealists sympathized with communism.[45] After having characterized modern times as the "Age of Very Personal Confessions", the correspondent in the Netherlands of the *Indische Courant* confessed to his readers in 1930 that he, as he visited

39 *De Indische Courant*, 09-09-1929.
40 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 08-04-1920.
41 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 11-05-1929.
42 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 06-02-1933.
43 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 21-05-1938.
44 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 21-12-1938.
45 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 04-03-1928.

an exhibition of French and Belgian surrealist paintings, would have liked to set about the canvases with a bush hook. The paintings were the work of perverted imbeciles, suffering from Freudian rabies. Surrealism had come to the surface of the swamp of the subconscious and now poisonous marsh gas had definitely affected the painters' brains. The surrealists were the gravediggers of art.[46] Among the representatives of surrealism in the Indies were Peter Ouborg and Willem Schippers. Ouborg's work could not be understood by the uninitiated, the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* claimed in 1936.[47] The correspondent of the *Indisch Courant* in 1940, however, could appreciate Schippers' work and considered surrealism a necessary stage in the evolution of art. Those who called it 'degenerated art' lacked the power to face a new reality.[48]

The hub of modern art was Paris. That was where Pablo Picasso, Juan Gris and Kees van Dongen went. And that was where they met Georges Braque, Henri Matisse and Fernand Léger. Where Igor Stravinsky met Claude Debussy, Osip Zadkine met Amedeo Modigliani, and Samuel Beckett met James Joyce. In Paris leading Indies' newspapers had their correspondents. They informed their readers in the Indies about the city's daily life. About parks and squares, shops and stores, food and fashion, and about salons, museums and galleries where modern paintings were exhibited. In 1921 the correspondent S. Heijmans Jz. wrote about what had caught his ear at the exhibition of Dutch art in the Salle du Jeu de Paume, near Château de Versailles. Vincent van Gogh and the younger painters got it in the neck. The spectators did not like the long and slender arms of Jan Toorop's *De drie bruiden* (The Three Brides) based on wayang figures. A female spectator exclaimed, "*Mon Dieu! Des kilomètres de bras!*" (My God! Their arms stretch for kilometres!), and she added, "*Si j'avais des tableaux comme ça, je les vendrais tout de suite*" (If I had paintings like that, I would sell them right away). In front of a painting that depicted a farm by Leo Gestel the correspondent observed a spectator roaring with laughter, "*Qu'est-ce que ça représente? Un tremblement de terre*?" (What is this supposed to be? An earthquake?). And everybody loathed Jan Sluijters' nude study. "*Elle est très mal faite. Cette une horreur!*" (How poorly done. It's a disgrace!).[49] The critic and composer Matthijs Vermeulen, who was a Paris correspondent for the *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* from 1926 to 1940, wrote under the pseudonym Hugo Reynst more than a thousand articles for his readers in the colony.[50] In 1932 he

46 *De Indische Courant*, 21-06-1930.
47 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 14-09-1936.
48 *De Indische Courant*, 29-02-1940.
49 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 09-07-1921.
50 Termorshuizen 2011:346–7.

violently criticized the first Retrospective of Picasso at the Galeries Georges Petit, rue de Sèze. Picasso had created, according to him, "a monstrous, misshapen, nameless chaos". The Spanish painter had lost his direction and his individuality, and so had all his followers, admirers and adepts. There was not a soul who knew a way out, but the painter had created a market and had become a millionaire. Picasso was in Reynst's eyes a "dubious person".[51]

Picasso

If Paris was the hub of modern art, then the hub's centre was Picasso. In the Indies in the 1920s readers became acquainted for the first time with the successful but controversial Spanish painter. The journal *Het Indische Leven* ironically called him "the new sun in the artistic sky". In the article "Very-modernest art of painting" the journal 'reviewed' Picasso's *Tête de jeune fille* (Head of Young Girl), a cubist painting from 1913. It let its readers guess what the painting represented. Yes, the illustration was enclosed. And no, it was not hung upside down. In the column "Anecdotes about artists" in *De Sumatra Post*, Picasso and a lady stand in front of his painting from 1913 *Femme à la guitare* (Woman with Guitar). The lady asks the painter where the woman's eyes are. Picasso looks for the eyes, "There are the eyes—o, no they aren't—here they are—no—here! Oh, no". Finally, he cuts his story short and hurls at her, "If you wish to see eyes go and look at Van Dongen!"[52] In the column "Around the corner" in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, the German-born Parisian art dealer, art collector, art connoisseur and art historian, explains a self-portrait of Picasso to one of his friends. The friend points to a spot on the painting and asks: "The eye?" Kahnweiler answers: "The watch".[53]

In the early 1920s European painters "returned to order" and produced work in a neoclassical style. Van Rossem in his column "Epistolae Batavae" in *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië* noted with satisfaction that Derain, De Chirico, Severini and even the ultra-modern Picasso, who had been the "Saviour of Revolutionary Painting", were converted to Beauty that always had been and ever would be Beauty. Had not Picasso himself disposed of his earlier work as "mental derangement"? Although Jan Toorop's paintings, museum pieces by the 1920s, were called at first "madman's work", Van Rossem assured his readers that the Spanish master's "pathological manifestations"

51 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 13-08-1932.
52 *De Sumatra Post*, 31-01-1920.
53 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 01-05-1920.

would be banished from galleries and museums within a few years. In the 1880s, when Toorop and his friend Ensor belonged to the avant-garde painters, there was only one movement that challenged convention, whereas in the 1910s there were dozens of them: dadaism, orphism, and the like. Towards all these "isms" a forceful position should be adopted. Abhorring compromise, Van Rossem called on his Batavian readers to wage war against "all this temporary madness".[54] In the late 1920s the "ever-seeking", madding modern mind seemed to have come to rest. The ultra-modern painter Picasso and the ultra-modern composer Stravinsky too inclined to the classics. What had been the use anyway, *Het Nieuws van den Dag* asked its readers, to follow these "unbalanced and pathological" spirits?[55]

Picasso always stood in the centre of the artistic storms. No other modern painter was more vehemently admired, imitated, discussed, hated. He was mocked and ridiculed, he was spat and sneered at. Picasso, however, was an explorer in pursuit of new worlds.[56] In 1929 he painted *Figures au bord de la mer* (Figures by the Sea). Picasso, who had been the prince of cubism, had become the chief of surrealism, as *De Sumatra Post* called the Spanish painter.[57] His "hallucinating" *Nu au fauteuil noir* (Nude in a Black Armchair) from 1932 seemed another point of departure for new explorations. Picasso's Retrospective at the Galeries Georges Petit in the same year was, according to the Paris correspondent of *De Telegraaf*, "an important and influential event". One of the most passionate avant-gardists was heard saying at the Galeries that "This is the end of painting". Picasso had carried art to its ultimate limit. The only one who could transgress it was the master himself.[58] Explorer though he was, two things never changed: his nationality and his character. In 1938 the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* published a review of Gertrude Stein's book *Picasso* with the headlines "The painter remained a Spaniard—His susceptibility to movements—Capricious character, typical for modern times".[59]

Would artists and artistic taste in the Indies be susceptible to the artistic storms that raged in Europe? "Our conservatism", the Batavia correspondent of the Surabayan *Indische Courant* stated, was a safeguard against European "charlatanry and snobism" which threatened to smother "serious art". Yet the correspondent had observed that some people in the Indies had a snobbish mind for charlatans. Not because a painting by Picasso or Mondriaan was beautiful,

54 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22-03-1921.
55 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22-08-1930.
56 *De Sumatra Post*, 03-08-1932.
57 *De Sumatra Post*, 06-07-1931.
58 *De Sumatra Post*, 03-08-1932.
59 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 02-07-1938.

"but because it showed good taste to pass for modern and bizarre".[60] Artists in the Indies who had been influenced by modern European painting were few. In Wouter Reuhl's paintings, the journalist of the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, recognized traces of Toorop and Picasso. These "traces" could only be appreciated when people were able to do "mental acrobatics". Pieter Ouborg, art teacher in Bandung, was a solitary. "The reason is, some people say, that he paints 'odd' things. Others, who have a good eye for it, say, 'O, he is a surrealist' ". Although its colours were fascinating, an understanding of Ouborg's work was not easy.[61] Ouborg, "with his modern conception of art" recognized at an early stage the qualities of the young Indonesian painter Sudjojono.[62] He recommended him for an exhibition in the Museum of the *Bataviasche Kunstkring*.[63]

Exhibitions

At the turn of the twentieth century the "residents of the Indies' palaces" were, the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* observed, anything but "patrons of art". The Indies was a "materialistic society". Yet these residents would enjoy fine arts, the newspaper stated hopefully, "if they were only given the opportunity".[64] In the Rembrandt Year 1906, when in the Netherlands the 300th anniversary of the painter's birth was celebrated, the Semarang newspaper *De Locomotief* had advocated a special exhibition of old and new Dutch masters. The newspaper induced the motherland to fulfil her obligations towards the Dutch in the colony. It did not ask for the *Nachtwacht* (Night Watch) or the *Staalmeesters* (Syndics of the Draper's Guild), it asked for some of the master's orginal minor works, and for original Breitner, Israëls, Maris and Weissenbruch paintings.

> Please send them in the east monsoon, at the best of times. And we promise you: As soon as—even if it is on the first day of arrival in Batavia—this excursion causes damage to your treasures we will send them back immediately.[65]

East monsoons came and went, but Rembrandt, Breitner and Maris never sailed to the Indies. People in the Indies then—perhaps because of the distance to

60 *De Indische Courant*, 15-07-1929.
61 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 25-06-1938.
62 Spanjaard 1998:38–9.
63 Spanjaard 1998:62.
64 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 10-04-1909.
65 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 13-02-1906.

the motherland—had hardly any knowledge of modern art.[66] Except for colonials on furlough in Europe, as late as 1929 they had not had any opportunity to judge it from their own observation. At best, people had read about modern art in newspapers or journals. The journalist of *De Indische Courant*, who had come to this conclusion, did not regret, though, that the Indies was spared innovations that were put in front of the general public in Europe as works of art.[67] A potential market for art in the Indies was, according to publicist Johannes Tielrooy in 1930, not to be found anyway:

> Buying a painting? That thought would occur only to a few well-to-do Europeans. The Eurasian? In general he prefers a gramophone, the cinema or dancing. The only things he can afford. The Chinese? Rich enough, but he buys odd plaster lions and puts them in his garden, etc.[68]

The first major exhibition of modern paintings in the Indies was organized by the German consul general in Batavia in cooperation with the executive committee of the *Bond van Nederlandsch-Indische Kunstkringen* (Union of Netherlands-Indies Art Circles). The *Deutsche Kunst der Gegenwart* (German Contemporary Art) exhibition was opened on 5 July 1929 in the building of the Bataviasche Kunstkring in the presence of Governor General A.C.D. de Graeff. The exhibition included paintings by Herbert Bayer, Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Max Pechstein, László Moholy-Nagy, Otto Gawell, Emmy Gotzmann, Paul Plontke, Eugen Spiro, and Karl Hofer. Despite their seriousness, the Batavian correspondent of the *Indische Courant* had written off half of the paintings. He had taken great pains to figure out what the "ultramodern canvases" represented.

> The Old Masters painted a cow, and then it was a cow. Modern painters trace some lines, draw some cubist squares, pay much attention to paint these poorly, and… give in the catalogue: Composition of a Whistle-signal…![69]

Van de Wall took offence at how the German modern painters had represented "the shape of the Woman". Without exception the women on Ernst Honigberger's *Frauen in Landschaft* were revolting. Willy Jaeckel had painted his *Sitzender*

66 Spanjaard 1998:37.
67 *De Indische Courant*, 15-07-1929.
68 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 22-08-1930; *De Indische Courant*, 23-08-1930.
69 *De Indische Courant*, 15-07-1929.

Akt auf weißem Fell "in an ungraceful pose". "Why paint a woman with dropsical legs anyway?" Was that the reason why the public interest left a lot to be desired? Apparently, the *Indische Courant* concluded, the Indies were not yet "ripe" for modern painting.[70] In Munich in 1937 paintings by Nolde, Schmidt-Rottluff, and Pechstein were displayed at the exhibition *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate Art), the greatest and best-visited travelling exhibition of its time. The Third Reich was definitely not "ripe" for modern painting either.

In 1933 the Batavia Art Society organized an exhibition of Dutch modern art, the *Tentoonstelling van Hedendaagsche Kunst* (Exhibition of Contemporary Art). Paintings by, among others, Jan Sluyters, Leo Gastel and Charley Toorop, by Piet Ouborg, Jan Frank and Rudolf Bonnet were on display. For the Indies this exhibition meant a "breakthrough", but not everyone's opinion was favourable.[71] One of the critics was Joh.B.M. Schilte, the editor of *Het Nieuws van den Dag*. Although the "conventional art" section—that is how the moderns had branded it—displayed "very good canvases", the public was more interested in "formless scratch and colour combinations" in the "hyper-modern art" section—that is how Schilte had branded it. The editor did not wonder, as all things eccentric aroused the public's nosiness. The exhibition catalogue compiled by Jeanne de Loos-Haaxman, curator of the Indies painting collection in Batavia, was another target of Schilte's criticism. Those who were not touched by the paintings, the curator seemed to suggest in the catalogue, did not understand modern art. For them modern art's "synthesis of primal force and primal form" was "formless". Schilte, who might have been vexed by the patronizing tone, parried with an account of a conversation he had had with a "believer" in modern art. The believer admired the "abstract expressions", spoke about the "subconscious", and claimed that the artist who had made this "crisscross of lines and colours" had tried to tell "something". Yet when the editor asked him what that "something" was, he remained silent. One thing Schilte knew for certain now: the modern artist was not able to bring about a sense of beauty in the spectator, not even in the spectator who was the artist's kindred soul.[72]

Two kindred, passionate, generous and wealthy souls, though, were the initiators of exhibitions of European modern art in Batavia that would become unparalleled in the colonial world. In 1935 the entrepreneur and art collector Regnault and the curator and art historian De Loos-Haaxman made an exhibition possible of thirty-three modern painters. It was a selection from Regnault's rich collection, including Campigli, Pascin, Severini, Utrillo, Gauguin,

70 *De Indische Courant*, 15-07-1929.
71 Spanjaard 1998:37–8.
72 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 13-11-1933.

Zadkine and Chagall's *Fiddler*. Yet the opening did not receive much attention. In his opening speech Regnault's son feared that many visitors would be suspicious of the modern canvases and so he invited them to look at the paintings carefully before passing judgement on them.[73] Apparently, the art critic of the *Java-Bode* had not done so. He violently criticized the paintings. Every single one of them bore the stamp of degeneration. "Our holy Art is vanishing in the depths of gross individualism".[74] "Chagall?", asked the art critic. Chagall felt the evils of modern times and had thrown away his precious talent. Regnault and De Loos-Haaxman were not taken aback at all. In 1936 they organized a Second Regnault Collection. Once again with Chagall, Campigli and Pascin. And this time with four Van Gogh paintings. Governor General B.C. de Jonge, who visited the exhibition in the company of Regnault and De Loos-Haaxman, was surprised—"in private!"—by a manufacturer of excellent paints who accepted that his product was abused in such a way.[75] The public in the Indies may not have been familiar with modern painting,[76] but the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* was jubilant about Regnault's and De Loos-Haaxman's initiatives. Colonial Batavia had become enriched by a beauty: a gallery that could easily withstand comparison with the best that other European empires had to offer in this way.[77] And there was even more to come. A Third, a Fourth and a Fifth Regnault Collection.

The Fourth Regnault Collection that opened in May 1938 in Batavia was a sensation. It included many paintings which had never been introduced to the Indies public before, with canvases by Marquet, Van Velde, Kruysen, and Pol, and two canvases by Picasso, a cubist *Composition* and a surrealist *Still life*.[78] Among those present at the opening were Governor General A.W.L. Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer and his wife, the members of the *Raad van Indië* (Council of the Indies), the head of the Department of Education, and the French consul general.[79] The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* published a photo of the Governor General deep in conversation with De Loos-Haaxman in front of a Van Dongen painting.[80] What the dignitaries thought in private of the canvases is unknown, but European modern painting seemed to be

73 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 10-01-1935; *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 10-01-1935.
74 Spanjaard 1998:55–6.
75 *Herinneringen De Jonge* 1968:350.
76 *De Indische Courant*, 03-03-1936.
77 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 09-01-1935.
78 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 16-05-1938.
79 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 18-05-1938.
80 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 21-05-1938.

approved by Batavian higher circles. Moreover, the critics were mild and understanding about the exhibition. The *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* thought it "extraordinarily attractive and interesting" to be able to study Picasso's "mature works".[81] The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* explained to its readers that modern painters did not copy nature, but composed forms, lines and colours to express themselves. Surrealist painters painted a visionary world, created in the subconscious from things without any relation to each other. Picasso's surrealist paintings were, therefore, "difficult to appreciate".[82] Although the *Indische Courant* reviewed Picasso's canvases as "extreme art", the paintings held the spectator spellbound. The colours were of a determined will, the lines and forms of a harmonious rhythm. Picasso's cubist *Composition* breathed vitality, his surrealist *Still life* self-control.[83] Vitality and self-control. Picasso was a modern man.

Sudjojono

One of the few Indonesians who visited the 1938 exhibition in Batavia was Sindudarsono Sudjojono. This talented and inspired painter founded in the same year Persagi, the Association of Indonesian Artists. Every month the association members gathered to discuss art, culture and society. The exhibition of the Regnault Collections enabled them to thoroughly study European modern art. And Sudjojono might have been the luckiest of them all. He possibly had free admission to the exhibitions, as his father-in-law was the museum's caretaker. Thirty years after the event Sudjojono described his and the Persagi members' feelings towards the canvases: solidarity and affinity with the European avant-garde.[84] In the cubist and surrealist paintings the Persagi members recognized the courageous artist who conveyed his message to the outside world, even if it was received with contempt.[85] They recognized an art without morals or tradition, an art only motivated by an inner urge.[86] Yet impressionism and expressionism appealed most to them. Paintings should be connected to visible reality.[87] Cubism and surrealism had no appeal to them, not even to Indonesian painters who had lived in Europe.

81 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 11-05-1938.
82 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 01-03-1939.
83 *De Indische Courant*, 11-06-1938.
84 Hadiwardoyo 1981:109.
85 Spanjaard 1998:111.
86 Spanjaard 1998:112.
87 Spanjaard 1998:95–6.

Although the cubist and surrealist canvases of the Regnault Collection were on display in Batavia for five years, they would have no artistic influence on Indonesian painting.[88]

At the Free Exhibition of Indies Painters in 1939 in Batavia more than sixty artists showed their work. Paintings by Sudjojono, Sukirno and Lee Man Fong hung next to works of Bonnet, Sayers and Ouborg. The *Indische Courant*'s art critic considered it "striking" that the Indonesian painters had not maintained any "oriental element or sentiment" in their art, but were inspired by Western art. Lee, for example, had a pure Western vision. His *Chinese lady* was a real portrait and his still life with bottles invoked a "contemplative mood".[89] About the first exhibition of Indonesian painters in 1940 at the Kolff gallery, the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*'s art critic observed even more clearly: Not only had Indonesian painters accepted the technique of oil painting, they had come to see their objects in a Western way, Sudjojono towering above the rest.[90] Their paintings depicted scenes from everyday life. There was Sudjojono's *Waterlooplein* (Waterloo Square), Sjoeaib's family portrait, and Hutagalung's view on the river Ciliwung. There was a self portrait, a sugar factory, an asphalt road with telegraph poles. Sudjojono himself thought the reviews severe, but honest.[91]

In the same year, with the Netherlands already occupied by German forces, artists in the Indies organized the exhibition *Indische Schilders Weerbaar* (Indies Painters Defensible). They had decided to support the "national cause" by disposing of their best work. The works were raffled to aid the *Weerbaarheidsfonds* (Defence Fund). The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* regarded the initiative as a token of loyalty and of sacrifice. The painters who contributed to this exhibition were, amongst others, Bonnet, Frank, Wichers, Dezentjé, Agus Djaja Suminta, Lee Man Fong, and Sudjojono.[92] In the presence of Mrs. Van Starkenborgh, the Governor General's wife, the exhibition was opened in August 1940. The travelling exhibition went to fourteen towns in the archipelago.[93] The *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* emphasized the participation of different nationalities. Apparently, the Indonesian and Chinese painters "took the national cause to heart".[94] And if European-modern-art-inspired Indonesian painting could support the cause, then all the better. The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad* praised

88 Spanjaard 1998:109.
89 *De Indische Courant*, 04-03-1939.
90 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 08-03-1940.
91 Hadiwardoyo 1981:111.
92 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 13-08-1940.
93 *De Indische Courant*, 12-11-1940.
94 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 16-08-1940, 17-08-1940.

Agus Djaja Suminta's "good modern-inspired study" and Sudjojono's "striking modern piece".[95] Living with the threat of war, raffling of art was an act of patriotism. And so was constructive criticism on modern painting.

Initially the Batavia Art Society forbade Sudjojono and Persagi members from displaying their paintings in the museum, but in May 1941 the Indonesian painters had their first exhibition in the Indies' most prestigious venue for modern art, the *Kunstkringgebouw* at the Van Heutszboulevard in Batavia. The exhibition was, as Spanjaard has called it, a landmark in the history of Indonesian modern art.[96] Almost all the artists were Persagi members and were autodidact.[97] The art critic Z. of the *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad* had "great appreciation" for the exhibition of the Indonesisan paintings. Z. was surprised by the ability of the artists, who had barely had opportunity to study the sources with their own eyes. Therefore, all the exhibits proved the search for form. Sudjojono's canvas *Depan klamboe terboeka* (In Front of the Open Mosquito Net) was "full of expression" and was "the best the exhibition had to offer".[98] De Loos-Haaxman's review in the progressive journal *De Fakkel* (The Torch) was, to say the least, patronizing. Indonesian artists should not fix their eyes upon European mondern painting. Why did not they seek contact with Balinese painting? Were they not more akin to Balinese people?[99] Spanjaard rightly criticizes the lack of the reviewer's empathy with the Indonesian painters and their cultural background.[100] The young Javanese art critic of *De Sumatra Post* was perhaps not nearer to the truth when he wrote that Balinese draughtmansmanship showed "no sign of individuality",[101] but this was just what the Indonesian artists were after and which they found in European modern painting.

In June 1941, when the exhibition came to Surabaya, the *Indische Courant* art critic expressed his support for the *Bond van Kunstkringen* in its "laudable pursuit". He fulminated, however, against the Western influence on the Indonesian inspiration, which had brought forth a pernicious imitation. The critic knew that nature was an imposter and that modern artists tried to represent nature stripped of appearance. Yet, instead of beauty, modern artists had created "clots of paint, unharmonious compositions, and distorted perspectives". European modern art had resulted in impotence and snobbery.[102] The *Soerabaiasch*

95 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 30-11-1940.
96 Spanjaard 1998:97.
97 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 07-05-1941.
98 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 12-05-1941.
99 Spanjaard 1998:99.
100 Spanjaard 1998:108.
101 *De Sumatra Post*, 26-07-1941.
102 *De Indische Courant*, 20-06-1941.

Handelsblad art critic wondered how to review the Indonesian paintings. Which standard to apply? The Indonesian painters themselves had caused this trouble. Their work was imitation: imitation of Western vision and of Western technique. Inevitably, imitation led to ambivalence, and ambivalence led to inferiority. Therefore, Abdoesalam's watercolours were lacking expressive power, Herbert Hoetagaloeng's impressionist paintings cut a sorry figure, and Agoes Djaja Soeminta's work resembled reminiscences of Ensor and Campigli and thus suffered from vacillation. The Balinese painters Toetoer and Soediardjo better studied traditional Balinese painting. "They could learn a lot from it".[103] Although the 1941 exhibition demonstrated that the Indonesian painters ran the risk of being swept away by European modern art, the Indonesian painters had hidden strengths. "But who will guide them?"[104]

War and Revolution

In 1940, the year that the Netherlands was occupied by German forces, and the Indies were cut off from the mother country, the Batavian journalist Will Oost had discovered in Picasso's pierrots an "endless melancholic loneliness", in Charley Toorop's group portraits a "carved loneliness", in Dmitri Karamazov and Rogoshin a "demonic loneliness", and in Aljoscha and Mishkin an "impossible holy loneliness". In those paintings and characters he had discovered the horrible solitude of modern man. In no other era were painting, literature, and plastic arts so demonic, and at the same time so down-to-earth, giving a picture of modern man who had gone completely astray, had completely lost his roots, and had become the loneliest of beings.[105] Why was modern man moved by Dostojevski, why was he touched by Van Gogh, by Toorop, by Picasso? In his lecture in Surabaya, art historian and man of letters Gerard Brom seemed to have found an answer. Art was neither good nor bad. The object of art was to stir up emotion. The more art touched upon the heart of the matter the more it would arouse man's emotions. That is why realism in art, Brom stated, was doomed. Modern man was moved by Dostojevski and Picasso because their works of art expressed the real reality.[106] This was the reality that made the Batavian journalist Oost shiver. On Christmas Eve 1940 he wrote, "We have to escape from our horrible solitude".[107]

103 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 25-06-1941.
104 *De Indische Courant*, 20-06-1941.
105 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 24-12-1940.
106 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 31-07-1930.
107 *Bataviaasch Nieuwsblad*, 24-12-1940.

One ominous year before, in 1939, shortly after German troops had invaded Poland, in Batavia the Fifth Regnault Collection had been opened to the public. This time the collection included 94 works of art. Regnault had submitted his Chagalls, Campiglis and Kandinskys. V.W. van Gogh, a nephew of the Dutch master, had submitted six Van Goghs. According to the Batavia Art Society committee member M. Levelt-Hoogvelt, the Indies became bit by bit familiar with European modern painting.[108] Perhaps that was true. Modern painting and modern criticism seemed to be beyond the "inferiority of emotion". The *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*'s art critic thought the exhibitions of European modern painting "of utmost interest", because the canvases reflected who "we" were. They showed a chaotic world where man tried to liberate himself from the restraints of nature and established conventions. Modern man was not able to duck out of this world, because he was part of it. The art critic regretted that the "conservative Surabayan community" lacked interest in modern art. That was a pity, he thought, because it had become "a truism" in the cultural centres of the world that painting was not recording outward appearances but "the escape from everyday life".[109] No, Surabaya was not Batavia, and was definitely not Java's Paris of the East.

The Fifth Regnault Collection as a whole found itself in Batavia when the *Koninklijk Nederlandsch-Indisch Leger* (KNIL, Royal Netherlands Indies Army) surrendered to the Japanese forces in March 1942 and the Indies was placed under Japanese military administration. Friends of Regnault had already taken care of the collection. They had unframed the paintings and, together with the gouaches and the water colours, had put them away in a big chest. In a small chest they had put away another seven paintings, including five Van Goghs.[110] Finally, they had brought the two chests to a safe at the *Javasche Bank*. In their search for gold and jewels the Japanese by accident came across the chests. They opened the big one and closed it again, the small one they left untouched. European modern painting was to the Japanese military not of any interest whatsoever. The paintings were neither exhibited as '*entartete Kunst*', nor were they shipped off to Japan, but neither were they destroyed. Perhaps they were just forgotten. Although the works of art had suffered from the tropical climate—some were heavily damaged—but at the end of the war

108 *Het Nieuws van den Dag voor Nederlandsch-Indië*, 21-11-1939; *De Indische Courant*, 22-11-1939.

109 *Soerabaiasch Handelsblad*, 24-10-1941.

110 P.A. Regnault to Ministerie van Overzeesche Gebiedsdeelen, Commissariaat voor Indische Zaken, 11-10-1946 and Rapport A. van der Struik, 23-12-1946, in: Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Procureur-Generaal bij het Hooggerechtshof van Nederlands-Indië, 1945–1950, nummer toegang 2.10.17, inventarisnummer 272.

the paintings were still in the bank's safe. On board the steamer *Sibajak* the battered collection arrived in February 1947 in the Netherlands.[111] Exactly thirty years later, one of these paintings, Van Gogh's *Vase with fifteen sunflowers*, was auctioned at Christie's in London for an astronomical price, being the first modern painting to become a record holder. The buyer was a Japanese life insurance company.[112]

Whereas the Japanse military administrators in 1942 may have been completely indifferent to Van Gogh's canvasses and to European modern painting in general, they were very interested in Indonesian art and artists. More precisely, how they could involve Indonesians in the Japanese cause for a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. And so, the Japanese gave Indonesian artists everything they had always wanted to have: painting material, art studios, exhibition venues. In return, it seemed, Indonesian painters became cogs in the Japanse propaganda machine. Affandi and Henk Ngantung, among others, in december 1942, displayed their paintings at an exhibition to celebrate the Japanese victory of the Great Asian War. Agus Djaya and Basuki Abdullah in cooperation with the Japanese propaganda painter Ono Saseo gave painting lessons at the *Keimin Bunka Shidosho* (Cultural Centre), which was installed by the Japanese military administration in April 1943, and which aimed to elevate the Indonesian people by eliminating Western culture.[113] Sudjojono became submanager of the Cultural Centre and, in March 1944, of the centre's successor, the *Jawa Hokokai* (Java Public Service Association). In 1946, one year after the war ended, Sudjojono wrote that during the Japanse occupation Indonesian painters had gone their own way. Indonesian painters were not just Japanese pawns. They had painted portraits, city views and landscapes in a realistic, impressionistic or expressionistic style, as they had done before the war, but now more sophisticated. For the Indonesian painters the Japanese occupation turned out to be, in Remco Raben's words, a time of "guided emancipation".[114]

At art exhibitions—whether by young or old, whether by famous or unknown painters—Indies spectators had not jostled each other. An exhibition of Indonesian painters in a Batavian classroom in 1949 aroused only "minimal Dutch

111 Spanjaard 1998:60; Zweers 1998; P.A. Regnault to ministerie van Onderwijs, Kunsten en Wetenschappen, 18-01-1947, in: Nationaal Archief, Den Haag, Ministerie van Onderwijs en Wetenschappen, Afdeling Oudheidkunde en Natuurbescherming en taakvoorgangers, nummer toegang 2.14.73, inventarisnummer 212.

112 De Loos-Haaxman 1968:108; Zweers 1998; Roodenburg-Schadd 1998; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_most_expensive_paintings#Van_Gogh.2C_Picasso.2C_and_Warhol (accessed 10 January 2015).

113 Hadiwardoyo 1981:115–6.

114 Spanjaard 1998:114–6, 2016:33–5; Raben 2009.

interest". The first impression of Indonsian painters influenced by Western art was disappointing. And that was understandable, according to the critic. The European community in the Indies had fostered "native industry" and "native artistry", and when Indonesian painters turned to Western culture away from tradition, government and community had been reluctant. When every population group in the colony stuck to his own sphere, circle or tradition, most Europeans seemed to think, radical changes would not occur and the Dutch presence in the Indies could last for eternity. Uprooted individuals were only a threat to a peaceful colony. There had been too few Westerners, according to the paper, who had supported Western-oriented Indonesians. This applied to Indonesian painters too. On the one hand there was Dutch refusal and lack of interest, on the other there was Dutch coddling and lack of criticism, paternalistic attitudes that undermined appreciation for modern Indonesian painting. Only four or five paintings—by Baharudin, Affandi and Sudjojono—made the exhibition worth visiting.[115]

As one of the prominent intellectuals writing in the weekly *Mimbar Indonesia* (Forum Indonesia), Sudjojono analysed European modern painting as a movement that had originated from a rejection of materialism. A new generation was after new ways and new values. The avant-garde—Cézanne, Braque and Picasso—tore matter into pieces, fragments and shreds (*materie dipetjah2nja*). It looked upon reality from many angles and perspectives. This reality which had more than three dimensions, it tried to capture in a two-dimensional frame. The movement, however, bogged down in a striving to be modern, and an unwillingness to understand (*kepingin sadja mau modern, tapi ngerti kagak*). Even European painters themselves, Sudjojono stated, did not understand Picasso's painting (*Seni-lukis Picasso tak dimengerti pelukis2 Eropah sendiri*).[116]

Post-Colonial Picasso

Soekarno, the first President of the Republic of Indonesia, was an avid art lover and ardent collector. He had a strong preference for nationalistic and romantic paintings, paintings about Indonesian heroism, Indonesian landscapes, and Indonesian women.[117] Although the Soekarno Collection included Sudjojono, Hendra and Affandi paintings, cubism and surrealism were not compatible

115 *Limburgsch Dagblad*, 19-11-1949.

116 Sudjojono 1950:21; Spanjaard 2016:42–3; for a public discussion on aesthetics between Trisno Sumardjo and Sudjojono, see Bogaerts 2012:238–9. I would like to thank Els Bogaerts for drawing my attention to *Mimbar Indonesia* which is held at Leiden University Library.

117 Spanjaard 1998:146.

with the president's cultural nationalism.[118] And so, in the early 1950s, when Sudjojono argued in favour of an exhibition of modern European painting, including Picasso, Braque and Matisse, Soekarno was not ready to cooperate. Besides costly and special military security that was needed for transport and exhibition, the president had no affinity with modern art—"why not just portray reality?". Sudjojono and other painters undertook the journey from Yogyakarta to Jakarta on their motorbikes in order to persuade Soekarno to let them have their way, but to no avail.[119] Although Sudjojono argued, through the spoken and the written word, that modern painting should not be abstract—as art should be intelligible to ordinary people—the father of Indonesian painting must have been impressed by cubism and surrealism, and by Picasso. "He believed that artists", as Claire Holt states, "should be politically conscious" and he cited Picasso as a good example.[120]

In spite of Soekarno's distaste for cubism and surrealism, Picasso paintings were to be exhibited in Indonesia, but not in their original form. In November 1950 the *Jajasan Pusat Kebudajaan* (Cultural Centre Foundation) in Bandung, West Java, organized an exhibition of 103 reproductions of the finest European paintings. The reproductions were made available to the Indonesian government by courtesy of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The modern period was represented by 25 paintings, including five Picasso paintings and four Braque paintings. Sjafei Sumardja, the president of the Foundation and the first Indonesian teacher at the Art Academy of Bandung, stated that although oil painting was of Western origin it had developed into an inextricable part of human culture. The Indonesian people were to be brought into contact with European painting, not to imitate it, but to gain more in-depth knowledge of it. The future of Indonesian culture would prosper by the richness of foreign cultures. Indonesians should not muse on the glory of the old kingdoms of Majapahit and Sriwijaya. European painting, including Picasso and Braque, was not a bridge to cross when Indonesians came to it, it was a way to moral and intellectual uplift.[121] That is what the French Embassy and the Centre Culturel Français thought, too. In 1957 the Embassy and Centre organized at the *Balai Budaja* in Jakarta an exhibition of reproductions of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French masters, including Van Gogh, Picasso, Utrillo, Cézanne and Vlaminck. According to the art critic of the *Java-Bode*, the 'modern' was predominant. However, there were

118 Spanjaard 1998:147.
119 Dolk 2012:68.
120 Holt 1967:216.
121 *AID, De Preangerbode*, 13-11-1950.

some meritorious canvases by Picasso, from the time "he had not yet broken the tradition of the 'classical' schools". The art critic did not criticize the cultural annexation of Van Gogh and Picasso by the Embassy and the Centre as French masters. For the French cultural attaché Paul le Bourhis the vernissage was a great success.[122]

To Picasso's *La Colombe* (The Dove), which was used by the international peace movement and displayed at communist meetings, President Soekarno did not raise objections. The dove of peace was lithographed from nature and showed no signs of cubism. When in May 1951 in Jakarta a ceremonial petition took place to endorse the decisions made at the Peace Conference in Berlin, Picasso's dove flew above the flags of France, the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.[123] In August of the same year youngsters and students held a meeting for world peace at Merdeka Square, Jakarta. They carried banners, red-and-white flags, and flags with Picasso's dove of peace.[124] The correspondent of the *Java-Bode* called the Peoples' Peace Congress, organized in Vienna in December 1952, a Soviet initiative. Participants of the congress were either "militant Bolsheviks" or "other-worldly dreamers and philosophers". Jean-Paul Sartre, philosopher, and Jean-Marie Domenach, editor of the literary magazine *Esprit*, worshipped Picasso's dove and in their mental blindness, the correspondent sneered, they could not observe that this bird was in possession of sharp, strong claws, resembling more a bird of prey than the peace movement's feathered symbol.[125]

Unlike artists all over the world, Indonesian artists were not enchanted by European modern painting. Only at the College of Art Teachers in Bandung under the inspiring leadership of the Dutch painter Ries Mulder did European modern painting have a strong representation. The art critic of the *AID, De Preangerbode* remembered an excellent cubist-style canvas by Sadali.[126] At the Second Biennale of Modern Art in Sao Paulo, which was held from December 1953 to February 1954, with 35 participating countries, the painter Kusnadi estimated that 75% of the exhibited paintings, were cubist, abstract, surrealist and futurist,[127] amongst whom Picasso, Braque, Leger, Klee, Kokoschka, Munch and Mondriaan. "In Indonesia we do not search for the kind of abstraction that consists of broken forms (cubism)", Kusnadi explained, "because we prefer

122 *Java-Bode*, 24-06-1957.
123 *Het Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*, 05-05-1951.
124 *AID, De Preangerbode*, 20-08-1951; *Java-Bode*, 20-08-1951.
125 *Java-Bode*, 16-12-1952.
126 *AID, De Preangerbode*, 18-04-1955.
127 Spanjaard 1998:151.

to paint the luxuriance and the soul of nature and the objects around us".[128] In Uruguay the Indonesian painters received a good press: Indonesia, which was represented by 25 artists, ranked among the best ten countries at the Biennale.[129] The painter Otto Djaya, although not inspired by Picasso, loved to quote the Spanish painter, when a doctor once reproached him that his anatomy of man was not any good: "Doctor, your people live perhaps only eighty years, mine live forever".[130] In the late 1950s when Claire Holt asked painters in Java to name their favourite European artist, "Van Gogh was mentioned most frequently. Other names mentioned often were Gauguin and Matisse. [...] Mondrian was never mentioned".[131] And Picasso? Picasso had "no appeal".

In Europe, on the other hand, as Dutch-language newspaper readers in Indonesia were informed, the interest in Picasso's paintings was as overwhelming as ever. In the summer of 1954 the Paris correspondent Jan Brusse was one of the thousands who flocked to the special exhibition of Picasso's works in the *Maison de la Pensée Française*. Brusse concluded that the master's cubism had played a major role in the intellectual life of the twentieth century.[132] Conversely, the Catholic poet, translator and art critic Gabriël Smit was baffled by the Picasso exhibition in July 1953 in Rome. He clearly expressed this in his article for the *AID, De Preangerbode* entitled "Picasso als charlatan" (Picasso as a charlatan): The bewildering Spanish genious, Smit wrote, had gone berserk.[133] Picasso had torn modern man into pieces, fragments and shreds. The exhibition in Rome ended with his 1951 painting *Massacre en Corée*. According to Smit, the tragedy of Picasso was the demonic tragedy of modern, unbelieving man who "fornicated and read the papers".

Modern man, however, had not just fornicated and read the papers. Modern man had torn and would tear men, women and children into pieces, fragments and shreds. By the thousands and thousands. In 1939–1945 in Europe and the Pacific, in 1950–1953 in Korea, and in 1965–1966 in Indonesia.

We have been listening to art critics in Dutch-language papers in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia. When it came to modern painting, they associated it with morality and politics, and used the term 'modern' in a negative connotation. In the early twenties the critics branded modern painting a "disconcerting symptom", a modish trend originating from "Bolshevik Russia". And when

128 Spanjaard 1998:152.
129 *AID, De Preangerbode*, 01-02-1954.
130 *De Locomotief*, 03-07-1952.
131 Holt 1967:259.
132 *Het Nieuwsblad voor Sumatra*, 13-07-1954.
133 *AID, De Preangerbode*, 29-07-1953.

European modern paintings came to colonial Indonesia for the first time, in 1929, the canvases were considered incomprehensible, "degenerate". Both modern painting and communism were products of the spirit of the age, both should be fought. Although colonial Indonesia, in the thirties, became familiar with Van Gogh, Picasso and Chagal through the five Regnault exhibitions, modern painting implied impotence and snobbery. In independent Indonesia, in 1950 and in 1957, exhibitions of European modern paintings, although being reproductions, aroused similar reactions in Dutch-language newspapers. Picasso was a "charlatan" as, in the twenties and thirties, modern painting was "charlatanry". Picasso's dove of peace was a communist bird of prey as, before World War Two, modern painting had been infected by communist chimera. Listening to Dutch-language papers in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia we hear that European modern painting could not stand the critics' test. In their reviews 'modern' was a repulsive word, as it was repulsive in 'modern times', devouring tradition, in 'modern society', isolating the individual, in 'modern man', losing his balance, and in 'modern woman', struggling to be free. Morality and politics were on the move, and Dutch art critics in colonial and post-colonial Indonesia were horrified.

When it came to presentations of Indonesian modern painting, in the early forties, art critics reacted in paternalistic tones. Painters in colonial Indonesia had not drawn their inspiration from European modern painters, they had imitated them. Indonesian painters had not maintained any 'oriental element'. Instead, one critic suggested, Indonesian painters should study Balinese painters, because they were akin to Balinese people. They had turned away from Indonesian traditions and had greeted European political and moral uprootedness.

We have also been listening, albeit for a short while, to Indonesian artists discussing European modern painting. Sudjojono, the father of Indonesian painting, admired Picasso, not for his cubism or surrealism but for his emancipation from morality, his political consciousness, and his dove of peace. That was just what the art critics in the Dutch-language papers most despised and feared.

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CHAPTER 6

Women, Film, and Modern Malay Identities

Timothy P. Barnard

From the 1920s until the 1960s the residents of Malaya and Singapore went through a series of political and social changes that culminated in a unified independent entity known as Malaysia. Whereas successful military uprisings against colonial states during this period occurred in Vietnam and Indonesia, ultimately resulting in their political independence, the Malay Peninsula remained an area of continuing colonial influence. Leaders in the Malay Peninsula negotiated the transfer of power and the British authorities approved of those who took their place, thus making the process transitional, not revolutionary, in contrast to many of its Southeast Asian neighbours. The only real opposition to colonial influence in the Malay Peninsula—a communist inspired 'Emergency' between the late 1940s and the late 1950s—never really threatened the state, and even led to laws and regulations that reinforced the role of the British and their successors in the region.[1]

During this period in the mid-twentieth century, almost all aspects of cultural and political policy focused around addressing Malaya as consisting of three distinct ethnic groups (Malays, Chinese and Indian) and their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the newly independent state. Prior to the Japanese occupation (1941–1945), much of this debate was funnelled through newspapers, leading to the development of localized identities for immigrant Chinese and Indian communities as well as an enhanced and increasingly rigid series of markers for Malay identity. After the Japanese occupation, these identity politics moved beyond newspaper debates, playing a role in the political negotiations related to the transfer of power to British-approved leaders and resulting in a society that mirrored its colonial ideal. This process has dominated much of the research done on the period, resulting in almost all accounts focusing on how ethnic identity influenced the political and social scene in the Peninsula and Singapore.[2]

The main sources scholars have used for understanding this historic process, beyond the Anglo-centric documents in the British Archives, have been

1 While this can be seen in a number of works, the most comprehensive discussion can be found in Harper 1999.

2 Emmanuel 2010; Omar Ariffin 1993; Barnard 2010; Harper 1999.

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Malayan newspapers and literature, as these are the most easily accessible texts reflecting the ideas and concerns of leading members of the local communities.[3] In addition to textual sources, an important new medium appeared shortly before the Japanese invasion and bloomed in the post-occupation years. This new medium was commercial film, whose production was centred in Singapore, the technological capital of British territories in Southeast Asia. The two main production studios were Shaw Brothers' Malay Film Productions (MFP) and Cathay Keris, which were Chinese-owned enterprises connected to cinema chains throughout the region.[4] Between 1940 and the early 1960s these two studios produced over 250 Malay-language films in Singapore. The participants in this film industry, both behind and in front of the camera, were often intellectuals who moved from the newspaper industry to this new medium because it allowed novel methods of conveying their understandings and hopes for society. In this regard, films were adapted from oral story telling traditions and echoed the comfort of old tales while also presenting and creating a new, 'modern' identity.[5]

Despite the wealth of memories and studies on the subject of film, a remarkable yet neglected aspect of the popular and academic scholarship on Malay film is the overwhelming focus on men in the industry. Certainly, all of the screenwriters and directors were male, but this focus needs also to be understood as the outcome of the hegemony of nationalistic and male-centric histories that are prevalent in Southeast Asian history.[6] Within the male-dominated world of Malay film many individuals parlayed their fame into greater positions of control and power, both artistic and economic. Directors and writers such as S. Roomai Noor (1923–1996) and Jamil Sulong (1926–2014) played a critical role in this new form of expression, and have either produced books discussing their role or have been specifically mentioned as pioneers in other studies.[7] The apex of this phenomenon is P. Ramlee (1927–1973), the icon of Malay film. Ramlee was the premier film star of the 1950s and 1960s, when he was an important actor, director, screenwriter and musician. To this day Ramlee is still seen as an epic hero of prodigious talent who charismatically raised Malay cinema from simply

3 Harper 1999; Emmanuel 2010; Omar Ariffin 1993.

4 There were other short-lived studios which made less than ten films each. These studios usually failed due to their inability to secure the support of cinemas. Major theatre owners in Malaya owned the other two studios, thus securing distribution (Barnard 2002, 2008).

5 Barnard and Van der Putten 2008.

6 Andaya 2006:3; Ikeya 2011.

7 Jamil Sulong 1990, 2007; Barnard 2002.

being entertainment to a commentary on Malay society and modernity. He dominates any discussion of film from that era, to the extent that analysts often blame the current doldrums in Malay film not only on the various technological and foreign products competing for the viewing public's attention, but also on the notion that there simply cannot be another Ramlee, who is perceived as the epitome of the greatness of artistic and commercial productivity of cinema in the pre-independence era.[8]

Ramlee, Jamil Sulong and Roomai Noor were not simply participants in the film industry. They saw their primary role as promoters of social reform, and used the developing art form of film to promote social ideas of modernity and independence. Compared to the emphasis on the role these modern directors and actors played in conveying ideas and concepts of the state and modernity to residents of Malaya, the agency of women in Malay film is often overlooked. There are very few articles, and no books, that focus on women as an important aspect of this Malay past. Within Malay film studies, if the role of women in film is mentioned at all, it is usually buried deep in the piece, or simply mentions the fame certain actresses achieved due to their beauty.[9]

This silence on women in historical studies of Malay film does not accurately reflect the role that they played in this new medium and in the larger society in the mid-twentieth century. Malay women had long played an important economic role in society through their mastery of agricultural production, home industries, and trade, which resulted in relative gender equality and high social status for women.[10] Their position began to transform in the twentieth century with the advent of more urban, industrialized economic roles, as well as the rise of new technologies, such as film. In cinemas, women were portrayed in a number of novel stereotypical tropes that promoted a more patriarchal understanding of modernity in a society that was transitioning from British colonial rule to independence. The legacy of such tropes is reflected in one of the more prominent voices in the memory (and memoirs) of Malay film. In his rambling yet informative account of the era, screenwriter Hamzah Hussin describes women in Malay films during the 1950s as "poison" ("*rachun dunia*"), and goes on to add: "During the 1950s the image and attitude of women that

8 P. Ramlee defines the era to such an extent that any Malay film made before 1970 is commonly referred to as "*filem* P. Ramlee", whether or not he was involved in its production. For examples of works that focus on Ramlee and his role in Malay film, see Ahmad Sarji 1999; Barnard and Barnard 2002; Harding and Ahmad Sarji 2002; Uhde and Uhde 2000; McGraw, Azmi and Nezia 2009.

9 This is particularly true for Maria Menado, who was known as the "Kebaya Queen": Uhde and Uhde 2000:22; Lim Kay Tong 1991:120; Barnard 2009a.

10 Hirschman 2016; Andaya 2006.

was presented in Malay film was negative, such as a temptress, destroyer of households, or a gold digger."[11]

In this chapter I examine these stereotypes and the ambivalent tropes of modernity and femininity that existed in Malay film during this era. Between the 1940s and 1960s women were increasingly portrayed in this new media as important engines of modernity within the household, a position that had previously not been central to their role in society. This transformation is demonstrated in this chapter through a discussion of the movies, the larger historical context in which they were made, and the role of magazines and other media in promoting the image of women in film to a larger audience. The role of women in popular forms of entertainment ran alongside debates on independence, technology and film, thus providing a parallel line of study of the influence of gender on these issues.[12] By examining these different contexts I hope to move beyond Hamzah's contention that female Malay film stars were seen as poisonous temptresses to a more multivalent understanding of the role that women played in Malaya's modernization. I argue that the presence of women in such a public and ubiquitous medium was not universally negative as Malay film actresses were seen as promoting an agenda of modernity in ways that differed from their previous role in society. While these women were often portrayed as temptresses, they were becoming models of modernity who promoted acceptance of the changing world around them from within the household.

Mothers and Temptresses

One of the few considerations of the role of women in Malay film is "Racun dan penawar" (Poison and antidote), a chapter in a collection of essays on women in pre-independent Malaya that also references Hamzah's earlier quote.[13] The authors, Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri and Faridah Ibrahim, analyse the portrayal of women in 11 Malay films that MFP produced. Most of the films they discuss were made in the early 1950s, a period when Malays had very little input into the plots and themes in the films. Using an analysis that claims to be based in feminist theory,[14] Fuziah and Faridah present the plots, themes, and

11 "Pada dekad lima puluhan, watak dan sifat kaum ibu yang ditonjolkan dalam filem Melayu adalah negative, seperti penggoda, punca kehancuran rumah tangga atau pisau cukur" (Hamzah Hussin 1997:84).

12 Barnard 2009b.

13 Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri and Faridah Ibrahim 2000.

14 Fuziah Kartini Hassan Basri and Faridah Ibrahim 2000:65–9.

dialogue of these films in binary terms, where women are portrayed as either temptresses or motherly figures. Fuziah and Faridah's analysis pertains particularly to the films of the early 1950s, when the plots often revolved around a conniving woman seducing a man away from either his riches or a more innocent, supportive mother or girlfriend. Films such as *Ibu* (Mother—1953), *Hujan Panas* (Hot Rain—1953), *Juwita* (1951) or *Karena Kau* (Because of You—1953) are good examples. Although somewhat laboured, their conclusions provide an entry into the subject of how women were represented in Malay-language films of this era.

Hujan Panas was one of the key films in the development of the stereotype of the urban-dwelling temptress consumed with a desire to obtain material riches, and can therefore serve as an example of many of the films of the period. The plot focuses on the character of Aminah, played by Siput Sarawak (1921–1999), a nightclub singer who will not return the affections of a struggling songwriter/waiter named Amir, played by P. Ramlee. Even though she eventually marries Amir, Aminah remains distant to him and even has an extramarital affair. Eventually Aminah leaves Amir and takes their child with her. With the family unit divided, Amir and Aminah drift back to their old jobs and poverty. Eventually, their baby dies and Aminah commits suicide under a passing train.

While *Hujan Panas* has a rather melodramatic plot, the portrayal of Aminah in the film and the performance of Siput Sarawak make it worthy of consideration. Sarawak was one of the leading stars of the period, and the film may be the most famous of her career. The harsh voice and gestures she used to portray Aminah symbolized the unforgiving materialistic nature of an increasingly urbanized Malay populace. As the *kampung* (village) was idealized during this period as a place of stability, tradition, and hierarchy, in contrast to the tough, diverse urban environment that produced these images, Sarawak, and other women in such roles, came to be the manifestation of the potential insensitivity of modern, urbanized women.[15] It was a role from which Sarawak would have difficulty distancing herself for the rest of her career.

Sarawak was the screen name for Ramlah binti Abdullah. She was born in Kuching in 1925 and as a young child she took to the stage in her family's travelling Seri Noran Opera, a traditional *bangsawan* theatre troupe that performed throughout Borneo and Malaya prior to World War Two. During this time, Sarawak met many of the people who would later become the early stars of Malay cinema. For the duration of the war, her family was brought under the protection of the Sultan of Selangor, who employed them as performers and

15 Kahn 2006.

singers for his household. Siput Sarawak's transition to film was swift, and was interlinked with its early development. In 1947 she starred in the first post-war film produced in Malaya, *Singapura di Waktu Malam* (Singapore at Night), and soon became a mainstay of early Malay cinema.

The strength of her performances in these early Malay films led many observers and colleagues to praise Siput Sarawak as one of the greatest Malay film stars of all time. Among her admirers was Mariam Baharom, a contemporary of Sarawak's who, in the Singapore Oral History Archives, describes Sarawak as "the best actress of the time".[16] Few actresses wanted to emulate Sarawak, however, as she soon began specializing in 'bad girl' roles such as Aminah in *Hujan Panas*—the greedy, urban-dwelling temptress. In such roles she came to represent all of the negative stereotypes of a certain kind of modern woman in early Malay film, those based in urban areas that had seemingly forgotten 'traditional' values. Ramlee articulated the ambivalence this attitude created toward Sarawak and the roles she played when he commented on her intensity after working with her in *Hujan Panas*. In one interview Ramlee expressed discomfort at being around Sarawak when the camera was not rolling when he commented that, "accompanying her excellence there was also a handicap that while rehearsing she acted insane and joked around, but when she went before the camera she performed beautifully".[17]

Modern women, as Sarawak portrayed them, were fierce, resulting in her being typecast as an uncontrollable, almost dangerous, force in the roles she played in many films. This supposedly negative portrayal, however, was one in which she was fulfilling previously important roles for Malay women. Sarawak was economically independent, and had autonomy in her life choices, as seen in *Hujan Panas*. In an increasingly urban and industrialized society, which was growing more distant from an agriculturally based economy, such women were now seen as a threat, and were condemned.

The reverse image of this threatening 'temptress' figure in Malay film in the early 1950s was the 'mother' figure, a more loving female character who usually lived in the *kampung*, and deferred to the needs of the male characters. Such women were now valued for their nurturing qualities, not economic contributions. The first actress to be identified as one of these 'good girls' was Kasma

16 National Archives of Singapore, Oral History Centre. Interview with Mariam bte Baharom, 001898, Reel 7, Reel 8.

17 The original quote is from *Hiburan Filem* 16 (20 September 1954): "Tapi di samping kebagusan ini ada pula cacatnya iaitu sewaktu sedang berlatih lakon Siput akan gila-gila dan membuat jenaka tetapi kalau sudah menghadapi kamera Siput akan memberikan lakonon yang betul-betul baik" (Ahmad Sarji 1999:371).

Booty (1932–2007) in most Malay films made prior to 1955. These characters were portrayed as guileless as they remained loyal to the male protagonist, only seeking his love and support.

A shift in the portrayal of women in Malay film occurred as Malays began to have a stronger artistic presence behind the camera, becoming involved in both script and plot development and direction in the mid-1950s.[18] Once again, one of the key figures in this development and in the portrayal of women was P. Ramlee. He did so by parlaying his growing stardom into a new contract in which he was given the right to direct films as well as ensure that his friends and fellow nationalists, particularly Jamil Sulong, were given control over the screenplays and production of films that reflected a growing emphasis on individualism and the role that women could play in creating an independent society that was distant from the earlier dichotomy of temptress and mother to one that reflected an important role for women in the modernizing society of 1950s Malaya.

One of the most important films in this regard was *Penerak Bechak* (The Trishaw Puller—1955). This film was the directorial debut of P. Ramlee, and represents his ability to convert his growing popularity into increased control over his career. While I have already considered the film elsewhere in the context of Ramlee's growing activism,[19] it also is important for its portrayal of women. In the film, Ramlee plays a poor trishaw driver named Amran who falls in love with Azizah, an upper class woman. Azizah, played by Saadiah (1937–2005), sees beyond the trishaw driver's humble background and tries to push him toward a path in which he is in control of his destiny. While the young couple faces opposition to their romantic relationship, particularly from Azizah's father, Azizah continually provides support to Amran by emphasizing her belief that all people are equal. Azizah is not a passive, accepting *kampung* girl; nor is she an urban-based temptress. She is bright, dynamic and individualistic, a socially progressive woman who does not judge people on their social and economic standing. Azizah opposes her father and the traditional conventions he represents and nurtures Ramlee's character, pushing him to understand the society around him. She is a new ideal, an urban-based woman who promoted new understandings about class, and the role of the individual in society.

18 It is important to note that the plots, scripts and directions of Malay-language films in the 1950s often were taken wholesale from Indian films. Malay artists had little input. Most of the directors of these films were from India and worked on contracts for the studios, which were interested solely in profits and thus the production of simple stories that were tried and accepted (Hamzah Hussin 1997:82; Barnard 2009b).

19 Barnard and Barnard 2002.

Penarek Becak was a turning point in the development of Malay film. It was not only an attempt to promote new social agendas, but also presented modern women as individuals who promote self-improvement and connect to fellow citizens on a level of contributing to the nation. Urban women were now moving beyond the negative association of the temptress such as those played by Siput Sarawak. Symbolizing this new modern woman was Saadiah, the star of the film and the younger sister of a well-known 'good girl' of early Malay cinema, Mariam. Saadiah was born in Singapore and became involved in movie making after accompanying her older sister to the studio and helping her practice lines. Saadiah first appeared in a film at the age of twelve and in many of her early roles she worked alongside P. Ramlee.[20] Due to their friendship, he cast her in many of the early films he made that promoted reinterpretations of traditional tales (such as *Hang Tuah*—1956) or nationalistic ideals (*Semerah Padi*—"Red Rice"—1956). Although her early goal was to become an actress along the lines of Kasma Booty—the ultimate 'good girl' of the late 1940s, and diametric opposite of Siput Sarawak's characters—Saadiah often portrayed a woman who was an amalgamation of the two stereotypes. She rarely portrayed a passive 'good girl' or 'mother'. Her characters took the initiative to better their lives while often playing the love interest of Ramlee. Through such roles, Saadiah was able to create a new form of ideal women for Malay film: the active, modern woman who not only supported the efforts of the male lead but often took matters into her own hands.

Although temptresses continued to appear in Malay films during this period, a subtle shift in the portrayal of urban women had also begun to appear. This was reflective of a trend of increasing urbanization in Malaya during the period. Between 1947 and 1957 the proportion of the population living in towns increased from 26 per cent to 42 per cent, while over one-fifth of the population lived in centres with populations over 25,000. As Charles Hirschman and Yeoh Suan-Pow have pointed out, however, the vast majority of this growing urbanization was among Chinese communities, who were moved into 'new villages' to counter the threat of a Communist insurgency.[21] Malay urbanization increased by a relatively modest 8 per cent in the ten years prior to Malayan independence in 1957. As political independence and the modern economy were focused in urban areas, Malays here, while honouring mythical 'kampung ideals'—which actually created idealized depictions of women as nurturing mothers who dominated the household—would also need to have role models where they lived. Women in Malay film would provide these models.

20 Ahmad Sarji 1999:333–4.

21 Hirschman and Yeoh Suan-Pow 1979:6–7.

An example of this new portrayal of women in Malay film, and of their independence and ideals as beneficial, or at least benign, is in another P. Ramlee film, *Bujang Lapok* (Ne'er-do-well Bachelors—1957), in which the action takes place in an idealized *kampung* where women thoroughly dominate. Women are peacemakers or potential brides for the bumbling heroes, but are not totally submissive to their parents or boyfriends. They are as active in achieving their goals as the supposed heroes of the film. This more complex characterization allowed the filmmakers to explore a variety of issues facing Malays in the 1950s, particularly the role of women in modernization, as well as how to maintain *kampung* values in a rapidly changing society.[22]

While the success of films such as *Bujang Lapok* and *Penarek Bechak* led to developments that reflect the changing status of women in not only Malay film but also Malay society, there were still restrictions. During this 'golden era' there were few 'feminist' films. Nonetheless, women were beginning to assert themselves in new areas of film production and promotion. While women were becoming major stars, underlying some of their more popular portrayals was a condemnation of overt sexuality or individualism. Women were to become modern, but there were limitations. To better understand these limitations, we should now turn to the context of the time, the mid- to late-1950s, a period of rapid decolonization and growing nationalistic feelings, to gain a better understanding of how much power and control these temptresses, mothers, or even vampires had over the production of their image.

Activism, Film and Women behind the Camera

As Malaya drew closer to independence in the mid-1950s, many participants in the Malay film industry became vocal advocates for greater control over their product in order to promote a nationalist and modernist agenda. Among Malay intellectuals one of the most important organizations promoting revolutionary ideals of the relationship between artists and society was *Angkatan Sasterawan 50* (ASAS 50, Generation of the Writers of the 1950s), who are mainly known for their literary production. Members of ASAS 50 saw themselves as revolutionaries promoting modernity.[23] Film was also important to members

22 Two other films made in the late 1950s, *Anakku Sazali* (My Child Sazali—1956) and *Pendekar Bujang Lapok* (Ne'er-Do-Well Bachelor Warriors—1959), are also well-received in Malay society and had relatively strong female figures, although in the later film a bumbling trio of popular actors from the period must rescue the main female character from kidnappers.

23 Barnard and Van der Putten 2008:140–3; Harper 1999:302–6.

of ASAS 50. While many members were journalists or literary writers, film allowed them to assess a new method of storytelling that echoed the oral and visual entertainment of the past. Through such a medium the ideal that art should be for society and provide guidance to the people (*rakyat*) had a new outlet. The intimate connection between artistic groups such as ASAS 50 and the film world can be seen in relationships that ranged from P. Ramlee's film magazine, *Bintang* (Star), being edited by Fatimah Murad, who was the wife of Asraf, the leading ideologue of ASAS 50;[24] P. Ramlee's friendship with key ASAS 50 member Abdullah Hussain (who wrote the screenplay for *Penarek Bechak*, along with Jamil Sulong); and S. Roomai Noor participating in an important conference on the development of the Malay language that the ASAS 50 organized.[25] In addition, many artists took activist views to the workplace, leading to the development of such institutions as a film workers' union, known as *Persatuan Artis Filem Malaya* (PERSAMA, Union of Film Artists of Malaya), which was formed in 1954 and even participated in a divisive strike in 1957 over the firing of four of its more radical members.[26] In the vibrant context of a society that was going through decolonization, rapidly modernizing, and dealing with a variety of issues such as political participation and citizenship in a modern nation-state, many of the more interesting Malay films were also made and they were infused with this spirit of social change.

In the 1950s Malay women were only beginning to emerge in public social roles outside of the marketplace and agricultural production. Although there had been a few female literary figures in the Malay world,[27] women rarely appeared before the public as entertainers and voices of change before 1945. The most common form of entertainment before World War Two had been *bangsawan* troupes, which presented a local form of theatre/vaudeville/opera. *Bangsawan* troupes had originally been all male; women began appearing in the shows by the end of the nineteenth century. These women, however, were often viewed as immoral, since they could be seen by anyone from the paying public and travelled from town to town.[28] *Bangsawan* served as a training ground for future film stars such as Siput Sarawak, and the negative representation of such worldly women was translated to early film depictions of

24 Barnard and Van der Putten 2008; Lockard 1991:23; Harding and Ahmad Sarji 2002:102–3.

25 At the meeting, Roomai made a passionate plea for Malays to gain control over the content of their films so they would reflect their won cultural values and language (Abdullah Hussain and Nik Safiah Karim 1987:156–64).

26 Ahmad Sarji 1999:286–9.

27 Mulaika Hijjas 2011; Ding Choo Ming 1999.

28 Van der Putten 2014; Tan Sooi Beng 1993. For specific information on women in *bangsawan*, see Tan Sooi Beng 1993:71–2; Mohd Anis Md Noor 1993:36.

temptresses, which was also reinforced in forms of literature. These negative associations often led to family opposition towards females joining the industry, as is clearly reflected in interviews with Mariam, Saadiah's older sister, who mentions her father's objections to her becoming an actress since it was not proper for a young girl at the time.[29]

Despite the prevalence of such attitudes, there was a change in how women were understood during the 1950s, with much of this shift resulting in increasingly nuanced depictions of women. The promoters of this new image were strong advocates of decolonization and nationalism who believed that an independent nation was one that espoused values of equality. Many of these ideas were considered radical at the time, and resulted in continual discussions and debates in newspapers and new magazines that were aimed at a female readership. This occurred during a period when women began to venture outside the home and market to take up jobs as secretaries, clerks, teachers and nurses. The expansion of job opportunities for women corresponded with a growth in organizations promoting women's rights across Malaya that advocated female participation in public affairs, alongside access to better health care and education. At times these activities led to female-dominated labour strikes.[30] In film, a binary depiction of women as either temptress or mothers was no longer standard, nor appropriate. This can be seen in characters such as Azizah in *Penarek Bechak*, which were presented sympathetically, pointing toward an idealized nation in which men would take on a greater role as leaders following the support and urging of women.

Ambivalence about the role of women as promoters of modernity in society is reflected in the career of Maria Menado (born 1932), the most popular female Malay film star of all time. If Siput Sarawak became the icon for the temptress in Malay cinema, and Saadiah was more sympathetically portrayed as a modern woman who combined the ideals of urbanization, nurturing and modernity, then Menado was an ambivalent, transitional figure. She first appeared on film in 1952, and had the difficult task of making the transition from 'good girl' to the supportive but assertive modern woman. Menado was born Liesbet Dotulong in the Netherlands Indies. After the end of World War Two she went to Singapore and worked as a model, winning several beauty contests. She was quickly signed to a contract at Malay Film Productions in 1951, and starred in several films as the female lead. Her

29 National Archives of Singapore, Oral History Centre. Interview with Mariam bte Baharom, 001898, Reel 2, Reel 3; Barnard 2009a.

30 One of the main figures in the 1957 strike of film employees was Musalmah, an actress at Shaw's MFP. Barnard 2004:162; Harper 1999:70–2.

early roles as the innocent girlfriend/wife established her with audiences, and Menado parlayed her growing popularity into a contract with the newly founded Cathay Keris studio in 1953. For the next several years, she became the face of Cathay Keris, along with Siput Sarawak's ex-husband S. Roomai Noor, starring in over 20 of the 27 of the films that were made at the studio between 1953 and 1958.[31] In most of these roles, Menado appeared as the traditional nurturing mother or girlfriend.

Maria Menado's popularity ultimately saved the Cathay Keris Studio, albeit through a performance in a film that combined, for the first time, the traditional binary tropes of women as mothers or temptresses. The film was *Pontianak* (Vampire—1957),[32] the story of a woman who transforms into a female vampire after she dies during childbirth. As the *pontianak* she takes revenge on the men who led to her predicament as well as those who exploit other women. In this depiction she is physically more powerful than men, and men are her only victims.

As Kevin Blackburn has written, the film can be read as a critique of the empowerment of women since the *pontianak* is a strong but demonized female. In another analysis Adeline Kueh points out that women who exuded overt sexuality, such as Menado playing the *pontianak*, were condemned, while another observer believed this character was 'a warning against the empowerment of women'.[33] Maria Menado could also be said to depict the ultimate manifestation of the temptress. She leads a dual existence as an innocent woman as well as a demon, representing the culmination of this already tired binary metaphor. By combining both qualities the popular character Menado was able to reflect ambivalent understandings of women as their role in society transitioned from having prominent economic roles to ones mainly associated with childbirth and the home.

The financial success of *Pontianak* led to a series of films being released over the next few years with similar plots and stars, all of which made handsome profits.[34] Menado did not star in all of these sequels because she soon became busy with new roles within the film community and society. In late 1959 or early 1960 she formed Maria Menado Productions, which enabled her

31 M. Amin and Wahba 1998:41–2.

32 Barnard 2002:129–30.

33 Kevin Blackburn, "Maria Menado: Feminist filmmaker?", http://www.hsse.nie.edu.sg/staff/blackburn/Menado.htm (accessed 20 December 2014); Kueh 2004; Moss 2004:130.

34 Including a series of *Orang Minyak* (Oily Man) films starring P. Ramlee that MFP released. These films feature a deformed main character who rapes women, which––in a deal with the devil––results in his return to "normality", thus reflecting an even more violent approach to modern women than the *Pontianak* films.

FIGURE 6.1 Maria Menado, posing for a glamour photo shoot, 1960.
COURTESY OF NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SINGAPORE.

to use Cathay facilities to produce her films and guaranteed their distribution through Cathay-owned cinemas, making her the first female film producer in Southeast Asia. There were, however, severe limitations placed upon her ability to control production and profits. The best example of her limited autonomy at Cathay Keris is the production of *Korban Fitnah* (Victim of Slander—1962), which reflected many of the problems she faced in the development of her own production house. Menado hired two well-known Indonesian stars, Sukarno M. Noor and A.N. Alcaf, in an attempt to circumvent restrictions that the Indonesian government had placed on foreign film distribution. The costs of bringing in and housing Indonesian actors ultimately meant that the production would not make a profit. Further exacerbating problems, Menado was unable to secure distribution for the film in Indonesia. Menado would go on to

produce four other films, all of which she was able to retain the rights to. She retired from producing and acting when she married in 1963.[35]

The limitations Maria Menado faced in developing her own films have many parallels in Siput Sarawak's move to Cathay Keris in the early 1960s. Sarawak's reputation as a headstrong, intense actress had hurt her career. By the mid-1950s she found it difficult to avoid being typecast. Her frustration with this situation by the early 1960s led her to pursue a contract with Cathay Keris, which had surpassed Malay Film Productions by this time as the most popular studio in Singapore and the Malay Peninsula. During this short period, many of the leading artists associated with Cathay Keris were able to achieve a level of autonomy previously unheard of in Malay cinema, as was the case with Maria Menado. This autonomy was particularly true after Roomai Noor, who oversaw production of many of the films during Cathay Keris' most artistic and financially productive period, became an Associate Producer at the studio in the late 1950s. Roomai Noor brought Sarawak, his ex-wife, to Cathay Keris with the promise that she would be able to direct a feature film. The film, which she also wrote, was *Mata Syaitan* (Eyes of Satan—1962).

While *Mata Syaitan* was made, it was not under the direction of Siput Sarawak. The financial limits Menado faced were equal to the problems that other women had in gaining some autonomy behind the camera. While Sarawak did sign the contract that led to her move from Malay Film Productions to Cathay Keris, some of the personnel at the studio protested against someone with little directing experience being given the job. Eventually Hussein Haniff, the critical darling and a directorial force at Cathay Keris at the time, was given control over the film.[36] Women were part of the growing activism that was intimately interlinked with the independence movement, but female actors were not to have creative authority for promoting a social agenda in the film industry. While they were limited in their ability to express their own ideas, they were being presented in a plethora of other media, particularly in the pages of increasingly popular magazines and newspapers where their image could be used to promote new consumer products that came to represent modernity. These advertising images further transformed the status of womens' roles from one based in mastery of agriculture and the marketplace to one situated in leading the household.

35 Barnard 2002:133.

36 Whether the film was taken away from Siput Sarawak because she was a woman is debatable. At the time there were numerous problems within the film union over the role of directors and their status on films (National Archives of Singapore, Oral History Centre. Interview with Mariam bte Baharom, 001898, Reel 3; Hamzah Hussin 1997:27, 85, 87; Barnard, 2002).

"Chara Moden" (in a Modern Manner)

While films were influential in conveying ideas of modernity during this period, they were part of a larger complex of popular magazines and newspapers that were part of consumer culture in post-war Malaya. The images in these texts promoted an ideal of women, modernity and culture rooted in the home. A vivid example can be seen in the film *Penerak Bechak*, in which Azizah's modernity is reflected not only in her relationship with the poor trishaw driver, but also in her growing mastery over modern appliances. In the film Azizah attends a cooking and sewing school named *Harapan Wanita* (A Woman's Hope), where she learns the rudiments of becoming a post-war housewife.[37] The school not only has modern machines on which students learn how to sew, it also contains stoves and mixing bowls so the young women can master their roles in a society in which electric appliances are featured. The school has rationalized, commodified and modernized the post-war ideal of female education, making it an increasingly important element of society as such products became available to more segments of urban society. The first shot from the school is a close-up of the school's name on a cake that one of the students has just taken out of an oven. The owner of the school, who the camera follows, compliments the woman who has just finished baking it and then goes over to the women working over mixing bowls. She then says that such skills "will be useful when you are all married". While women are expected to maintain their traditional roles as wives and mothers, they will be conduits for modernity through their mastery of the tools of the kitchen and the food they can produce, not employment or trade.[38] This model for proper female behaviour was reinforced in magazines and newspapers throughout the era.

In her study of French consumerism in the 1950s and its relation to decolonization, Kristin Ross has posited that women played the key role in this process as they were to be the arbiters of modernity, an idea that would begin in the home. The role that women would play in this modernization process was ambiguous and contested globally.[39] In the case of Malay women, the modernization of the home meant increasing restrictions to their status and social roles. In the traditional economy they had mastered trade and agricultural

37 Such schools were a common feature in Singapore in the 1950s (Kartini Saparudin 2002:39–42). For an example of such a school receiving praise for teaching young women "to learn feminine arts and crafts, before being dispatched home again to spread the new information among their friends in the village" and "to be good wives", see *Her World* (January 1961):7–9.

38 Barnard 2004:75–86.

39 Modern Girl Around the World Research Group 2008.

production. They were now reduced to the message that women's magazines brought across, which in Ross' words, was "the home was the basis of the nation's welfare: the housewife [...] efficiently caring for the children".[40] To care for the home, thus, was to care for the newly formed nation. These theories are also applicable to the Malayan context due to growth of women's magazines in the 1950s, which were rooted in Western notions of femininity. Shortly after World War Two, magazines that featured short stories with socially conscious themes focusing around women's issues began to appear in Singapore. These magazines promoted ideals of education and job equality in a context where women were no longer vital elements in the local economy, but now played service roles, such as secretaries or nurses.[41]

By the early 1950s many of these magazines and periodicals, such as *Ibu* (Mother), transitioned to an emphasis on female beauty and fashion, and were soon joined by the growing popularity of entertainment magazines related to the film industry. It is through these magazines that a new image of women was promoted, usually based in the household, and some of the female stars of Malay cinema became important figures in this medium. In 1957, for example, Maria Menado was featured in a *Time* magazine article about the freedom of Islamic women throughout the world.[42] Menado received criticism in the local press due to the photograph that accompanied the piece. She was featured wearing an outfit that combined a bathing suit and shorts ("*seluar yang sengkat*"), which was regarded as immodest. She stated that she saw nothing wrong in wearing revealing clothing ("*tidak lengkap*") since all women, regardless of race or religion, wanted to be modern ("*chara moden*").[43] The critical local press coverage and Menado's attempts to defend herself reflected an uneasiness with the status that famous Malay women were achieving on an international stage, particularly those who followed a manner of dress that was perceived as Western and modern in defiance of traditional standards, and were unrelated to their prior roles in society.

40 Ross 1995:78; Ikeya 2011:96–119.

41 One such example is the journal *Juita*, which featured articles such as "Jangan salahkan Ibumu" (Don't blame your mother). Hamedi Mohd Adnan 2002:199–200; Harper 1999:283–8; Barnard 2010.

42 Throughout the period, Islam was rarely cited as a motivation in promoting, or condemning, these new portrayals of women. Anonymous, "Maria pakai seluar yang sengkat", *Berita Harian*, 06-12-1957, p. 5.

43 Anonymous, "Maria only wears shorts at home", *The Straits Times*, 03-12-1957, p. 7. The issue of female swim attire was discussed in a 1956 issue of *Fashion*. I would like to thank Kartini Saparudin for pointing this out to me. It is referenced in Kartini Saparudin 2002:52.

The flare-up over Menado's costume in an international magazine can be seen as transitional as it was the focus of debate, while content promoting female independence and individualism grew increasingly complex. Magazines began disseminating images of modern women as supporting the nation through consumer bliss, in contrast to job equality and education, thus offering mixed messages about beauty and the home. Malay film stars were the avatars of this modernity, at least within the publishing industry based in Singapore. Within local women's magazines actresses had a role to play in promoting a notion of modernity among the newly decolonizing masses that was not totally dependent on beauty; it was to be based on the maintenance of a happy household stocked with consumer products.

Within this context, one last actress needs to be introduced. At Cathay Keris, actor S. Roomai Noor met a newly signed actress named Ummi Kalthoum (1932–2013) in the late 1950s. Cathay Keris talent scouts brought Ummi from her Negri Sembilan home to Singapore for a series of screen tests. Soon thereafter Roomai Noor and Ummi Kalthoum married and went on to become the signature couple for Cathay Keris in the early 1960s. Much like Maria Menado, Ummi also achieved a level of international notoriety early in her career when she was named one of the most beautiful women in the world in a 1957 issue of *Life* magazine.[44] Consternation arose in the Malay community, however, because at that time Ummi usually played the role of the temptress in her films. There were protests over her being given such a title since some commentators believed that a 'bad girl' should not be held up as a representative of Malay beauty and morality.

In popular magazines of her time, Maria Menado is invariably presented as a beauty expert, not as a consumer of household products, reflecting an ambivalence about a modern woman who was attempting to become a leading business figure in the film industry. In the pages of one of the more popular English language magazines, *Her World*, Menado provided tips on make-up or advice on how to maintain a beautiful complexion, with the advice ranging from how many pints of water to drink a day (three) to the correct amount of beauty rest (eight hours).[45] When it comes to advertising household items in the same magazine, however, she is noticeably absent; in her only appearance she promotes Lam Soon margarine.[46]

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44 Lim 1991:136–7.

45 For example, see *Her World* (September 1960):24, (November 1961):40–1, (March 1962):20. *Her World* was first published in Singapore in 1960, and is currently the most popular English-language fashion magazine in Singapore.

46 *Her World* (February 1961):6.

Ironically, Maria Menado would be completely marginalized from any position as a model for modernity once she married in 1963, as her new husband was the Sultan of Pahang. This marriage to a traditional elite may be seen as an extremely redemptive move. As someone who possessed the beauty to gain the attention of a sultan, she was expected to withdraw into the role of wife/mother, as is proper and traditional. In her earlier years, she was accepted as beautiful and modern, and promoted new roles for women that glorified their mastery of the household. Once she married a member of the aristocracy, however, she disappeared from the public eye; Her beauty was for her husband's eyes only, not public spectators. Her image and films could no longer be shown in theatres or in the pages of magazines.[47]

In contrast to Maria Menado's trajectory, during this same period, Ummi Kalthoum was idealized as a mother and film actress and became a spokesperson for household products in popular magazines, as she was married to a model of the modern Malay man, S. Roomai Noor, a nationalist filmmaker who had been a member of ASAS 50. In the same pages of *Her World* that featured Menado's beauty tips, Ummi appeared monthly in a promotion for baby formula. Her role as the supervisor of nutrition in the household allowed Ummi to be portrayed as a new modern housewife. She was no longer an equal contributor to the nation through her mastery of economic roles. She now supported a patriarchal husband who had a prominent position in the community. This role was supported through the presence of articles that idealized her home life with Roomai Noor. In one such article, Roomai even defends his wife: "She always seemed to get stuck with Bad Girl roles [...] but to me she always seemed a *good* girl."[48] The article further promotes the modern bliss of the couple with the statement that, "Like all wives, she shares his career". This is in contrast to Maria Menado, who can no longer work due to her status as a sultanah. Ultimately, the support Ummi provides in the house is as important as any work Roomai did in the studio, since the article fails to mention her own role as a well-known actress at Cathay Keris.

While Maria Menado and Ummi Kalthoum appear to fulfil different roles, with one focusing on beauty as well as a return to traditional concepts of marriage and female roles in society, while the other is focused on the household and motherhood, both are promising that the consumption of fashion, beauty products and even infant formula are a route to self-transformation and actualization, as Chie Ikeya has argued under similar

47 Moss 2004:130–2.

48 Italics are in the original. *Her World* (April 1961):62.

circumstances with regard to Burma.[49] Progress and modernity were available to all through consumption, although this was now in subservience to the patriarchy. In Malaya, however, active social participation for married women outside the household was not to be idealized.

The idealization of modern housewives in Malay magazines of the late 1950s and early 1960s was further emphasized in their coverage of the star of *Penarek Bechak*, Saadiah. Shortly after her leading roles in some of the greatest Malay films ever made, Saadiah married Ahmad Daud, a singer from Penang and an old friend of P. Ramlee. An article that appeared in 1962 on Malay Film Productions' studio at Jalan Ampas in Singapore contained a glowing description of Saadiah as she returned to acting after a leave of absence due to the birth of several children. In the article, Saadiah is described as being "relaxed", "good tempered", as well as having a "co-operative spirit".[50] Such depictions were among the most important roles that these women played in the development of a modern Malayan society. As working women who balanced marriage, children and a career, Malay actresses such as Ummi and Saadiah were becoming the public ideal of the modern woman.

Conclusion

In the twenty years following the Japanese occupation the portrayal of modern Malay women, particularly those related to the very public film industry, went through a number of changes. Initially, women were portrayed in a very binary fashion, as either motherly figures or temptresses in which rooteedness in an idealized traditional culture of *kampung* values was celebrated in contrast to the harshness of a diverse, urban environment that was distant from this ideal. These depictions were a reaction against changing gender roles in a society that was urbanizing and modernizing. In this new setting women, who previously held important roles as farmers and traders, would now be judged on their ability to nurture men who sought new positions in the rapidly changing society. As young nationalists like P. Ramlee and Roomai Noor, gained increasingly important roles over film production, however, women became models for a more complex urban-based modernity, which was depicted as bright and dynamic, promoting individualism and self-improvement. These women, particularly Maria Menado, were to act as guides for a modernizing society transitioning from colonial rule to

49 Ikeya 2011:118.

50 *Her World* (August 1962):14–5.

independence. As the depictions of women became increasingly complicated and society entered a phase of early independence, a further transition occurred. Modern women now moved from maintaining vital roles in the economy to purveyors for the consumer household, particularly following marriage. The image of women in a *chara moden*, thus, was never static. It shifted constantly, much like society itself during a two-decade period of change, although it was continually promoting a growing patriarchal leadership for the new, modern Malay.

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CHAPTER 7

Talking Sex, Making Love

P. Moe Nin and Intimate Modernity in Colonial Burma

Chie Ikeya

Loss of Innocence Redux

On 27 November 2012, the sex education magazine-cum-erotica *Hnyou* (Enchant)[1] hit the stands in Burma (Myanmar). Heralded as the first of its kind, *Hnyou* featured photo spreads of scantily clad models, articles offering racy romance tips such as "Secrets of the bedroom", as well as a question-and-answer sex column. Notwithstanding its relatively expensive price and despite, or perhaps due to, the red warning on its cover indicating that the magazine is suitable "for over 18s only", *Hnyou* became an overnight success among the youth in the country. Just as instantly, the publication was banned, with the then Minister of Information denouncing the "almost pornographic" content of the magazine offensive to Burmese cultural sensibilities.[2] Oo Swe, the editor-in-chief of *Hnyou*, defended the magazine, insisting that it presented sex-related topics from a health or clinical point of view. Indeed, *Hnyou* has stirred heated debates about sex education and the need to tackle Burmese attitudes toward sex, which are widely perceived to be prudish, old-fashioned, and unscientific.[3]

In the wake of the *Hnyou* controversy, few in Burma appeared to know or remember that *Hnyou* was hardly the first Burmese publication to bemoan the putative primitiveness of sexual knowledge among the Burmese, summon public and 'scientific' discussion and management of 'private' matters, and be chastized for so doing. It has gone largely unnoticed that almost a century ago, the modernist writer, Catholic convert and apostate, journalist, educator, and Burma's first sexologist, P. Moe Nin (1883–1940) produced a substantial body of popular literature on the 'science of sex' and the 'psychology of love'.

1 All translations from Burmese are my own.

2 Reported by Oo Swe in an interview, in January 2013, with the *Irrawaddy Magazine*, https://burma.irrawaddy.com/opinion/2013/01/19/31380.html (accessed 19 January 2016).

3 Sat Su 2012; Shwe Yee Saw Myint 2013.

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Venerated as one of the founding fathers of modern Burmese literature and considered to be the most prolific writer of the colonial period (1826–1947), Moe Nin is a towering historical figure in Burma. Outside of the country, however, he is all but unknown. And Burmese scholarship on Moe Nin has thoroughly neglected his sexological works, though this is not surprising given that the history of sexuality in Burma has yet to be written. It is also worth noting that historical studies of sexology in Southeast Asia, in general, are virtually non-existent despite the recent growth in the scholarship on sexuality in the region.[4]

In this chapter, I explore the life story and writings of this pivotal yet forgotten figure in the history of vernacular sexual culture and modernity in Burma. I focus in particular on one of his numerous "treatises on love and matrimonial affairs", as they were referred to by Burmese literary scholars: *Kāma theidi kyan* (Treatise on the perfection of desire, 1931). What do *Kāma theidi kyan* and other parts of his literary oeuvre—and their critical reception—reveal about how Burmese regimes of marriage, family, and sexuality were reconstituted in interwar British Burma? What do they suggest about the formation of modernity under conditions of colonial rule?

As I show in the following pages, Moe Nin, in his professed quest to free sex and love from 'irrational' customs, fashioned a new hegemonic family that revolved around the heterosexual, conjugal couple and that privileged emotion, choice, and individualism over social obligation. He positively affirmed sexuality and desire—among both women and men—as a hallmark of the modern subject. Moe Nin's reformulation of the intimate, I argue, cannot be neatly explained as a story of the globalization of (Eurocentric) modern ideologies of love, marriage and family, or the scientization of sex, sexuality and reproduction. His writings furthermore complicate current understandings of the politics of the family in colonial Asia that have stressed the nationalist construction of the intimate domain as a site through which to safeguard tradition and nation from 'Western', colonial modernity. His critique of what he deemed 'traditional' Burmese marriage and family norms and forms, offered at the very height of anticolonial nationalism in Burma, confounds any attempt to frame Moe Nin as an agent of either colonialism or nationalism.

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4 To my knowledge, Edwin Wieringa's study (2002) of the *Sĕrat candraning wanita*, a voluminous Javanese manuscript on erotic love written in the 1930s, is the notable exception. In it, the author similarly notes that Javanese erotica have hitherto received little scholarly attention. In contrast, a voluminous historical literature on sexology and erotic love exists in East and South Asia. For a historiography of the scholarship on sexualities in Asia, see Loos 2009.

Moe Nin, the Wandering Savant[5]

Born in Thonze just north of the colonial capital Rangoon to a once affluent family, P. Moe Nin (aka Maung Kyaw Nyun) grew up with an absent father and a hard-working mother who eked out a meager living by selling various goods in the market.[6] In his autobiography *P. moe nin e p. moe nin*, (P. Moe Nin's P. Moe Nin), Moe Nin claims that he viewed education as the key to escaping the hardship that he endured as a child.[7] At the tender age of 10, he ran away from his family to join the Roman Catholic Mission Normal School in Thonze where his half-sister was also a student, and was subsequently adopted by Father Félix Perroy (1866–1931). Three years later, Moe Nin began attending a seminary school in the southeastern port city of Moulmein where he was given the Christian name Philip. Having excelled in Latin, he was admitted into the seminary Collège général in Penang (then part of the British Straits Settlements) with a scholarship in 1899, and studied Latin, psychology, objectivity, logic and reason.[8] Unable to envisage himself making—or rather, keeping—a lifelong commitment to the priesthood, and particularly celibacy, which he would have been expected to do were he to complete his seminary degree and be ordained, Moe Nin discontinued his study and returned to Burma in 1902.[9]

For the next decade or so, Moe Nin led a peripatetic life, taking up a number of different jobs in the process and wandering from mission schools to monasteries to farmsteads and even to a home for vagrants. Upon returning to Burma, he first went to Father Perroy, who gave him a position as a teacher at the mission school in Thonze. He moved in with his mother who, as it so happened, had remarried an avid student of traditional Burmese literature. It was from his stepfather that Moe Nin, who had stopped formal instruction in Burmese language and literature since his seminary days, acquired his knowledge of and appreciation for the subject. Also at about this time, Moe Nin was ordained temporarily as a monk, marking his turn towards Buddhism and away from Christianity (although he maintained close

5 Biographical information on Moe Nin has been taken largely from the following: Moe Nin 2007; Gyi Khin and Myint Swe 1973; Moe Nin 2013a; "P. Moe Nin" 1966.

6 Moe Nin 2007:13.

7 Moe Nin 2007:14.

8 The Collège général, as with the schools in Thonze and Moulmein that Moe Nin attended, was founded and run by the *Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris* (Society of Foreign Missions of Paris).

9 Moe Nin 2007:21–2.

relations with Father Perroy and Roman Catholic mission schools, where he would continue to teach).[10]

In 1906, he was ordained again in order to escape an unhappy marriage into which he had reluctantly entered, just three months prior, with a young daughter of a wealthy neighbour.[11] Moe Nin devoted himself to the study of *vipassanā* (insight meditation) at the monastery of the eminent scholar-monk Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923), whom he followed to Rangoon. There, he befriended Ananda Metteyya (Allan Bennett, 1872–1923)—Britain's first Buddhist monk and the founder of the International Buddhist Association—and helped the latter with the publication of *Buddhism: An Illustrated Quarterly Review* (1903–1908), the official organ of the association.[12] His second temporary ordination lasted approximately two years, after which he disrobed and married Ma Sein Tin.

Moe Nin remained unemployed for several years after this second marriage, relying on the support and generosity of his wife's family. Only in the mid 1910s did he begin to show promise as a writer. In 1914, Moe Nin published *Loki lan pya niti kyan* (Treatise on worldly affairs), the first of many 'treatises' that he would write. By 1916, he was working for the top two Burmese newspapers, *Myanmar Alin* (New Light of Myanmar) and *Thuriya* (The Sun), as translator of international news, war correspondent, and editor, all the while teaching Latin at the Ahlone Baptist school. Over the next 23 years, he wrote for virtually all of the major news outlets in Burma—including *Myanmar Alin*, *Thuriya, Pyinnya Alin* (Light of Knowledge), *Bandoola, Kawi Myak Hman* (Scholar's eyeglasses), *Dagon*, and *Toe Tet Yay* (Efficiency)—and served as an editor for a good number of them. Characteristic of Burma's modernist literary vanguard, he also translated and adapted English novels.[13] The two most famous, both

10 In his autobiography, Moe Nin explains that he had long harbored doubts in the Christian faith but, at the same time, was not inclined to apostasize. What occasioned his turn to Buddhism was his love affair with Ma Han, a young Buddhist woman. Their mutual affection went unacknowledged due to the fact that he was Christian and she was Buddhist. Eventually, an elder woman in his community instructed Moe Nin to *shin byu* (undertake temporary ordination). Ma Han, upon hearing of this, arranged for him to be ordained at a local monastery. He was ordained soon after.

11 The abandoned wife succumbed to plague shortly thereafter.

12 Bennett ordained in Burma in 1902. The following year, he established *Buddhism*, which he edited and printed in Rangoon. The precise nature of Moe Nin's contribution to the publication of the periodical is unclear; he does not provide specific details in his autobiography (Moe Nin 2007:44). Interestingly, Moe Nin also indicates that he learned "chemical analysis" from Bennett, who had formerly trained and worked as an analytical chemist in London.

13 Several other Burmese vanguard writers such as Shwe U Daung (1889–1973), Zeya (1900–1982), and Dagon Khin Khin Lay (1904–1981) entered the literary field by adapting foreign works.

published in 1920, were *Ne yi yi*, based on *Just a girl* (1898) by Charles Garvice, and *Ne nyo nyo*, an adaptation of Marie Corelli's *Innocent: Her fancy and his fact* (1914). In addition, he wrote screenplays and directed films. All told, Moe Nin published at least 232 short stories, 85 novels, 50 treatises and self-help books, and 15 study guides on English and Latin, establishing himself as a pioneering novelist, journalist, scriptwriter, and one of the most influential contributors to the development of modern Burmese literature. Besides his own literary production, his support and encouragement of Burma's first generation of college writers, the *Khitsan* (Testing the age) writers, helped usher in the country's 'modern literary renaissance' in the 1930s.[14]

The last decade of his life was perhaps the hardest Moe Nin had experienced, despite the extraordinary success he enjoyed as a writer. His eldest child Maung Kyaw Soe, a celebrated actor, was fatally stabbed by his alleged lover in 1930, when he was only 20 years old.[15] Three months after the murder of Maung Kyaw Soe, Ma Sein Tin passed away. Reeling from the sudden loss of his beloved son and wife, Moe Nin explains, he was unable to provide for his remaining son and daughter, and left them in the care of his wife's relatives in Thonze.[16] Moe Nin died in Rangoon in 1940 due to complications resulting from a combination of leg injuries sustained during a bicycle accident, diabetes, and, finally, pneumonia. The who's who of the literary and publishing scene in Burma eulogized Moe Nin as "the writer who opened Burma's eyes to a wide variety of novel literary forms",[17] and formed a committee to oversee the elaborate weeklong funeral ceremony.

Treatises on Love and the Perfection of Desire

Although Moe Nin wrote non-fiction on a wide array of topics ranging from business, right conduct, and health and hygiene, a considerable number of

14 The *khitsan* writers were students of Rangoon University's first Burmese professor U Pe Maung Tin and the first graduates of the Burmese literature degree course at the university. The essence of the *khitsan* movement was the experimentation with novel literary techniques, and the principal goal of this experiment was to render Burmese literature more accessible to and inclusive of the everyday person. For more on the *khitsan* movement, see U Pe Maung Tin's foreword to the collection of *khitsan* short stories in Pe Maung Tin 1976. Also see Hla Pe 1968; Win Pe 2009.

15 She testified during her trial that they were never lovers, he was stalking her, and that she stabbed him in self-defense (Gyi Khin and Myint Swe 1973:234–5).

16 Gyi Khin and Myint Swe 1973:238–9.

17 Gyi Khin and Myint Swe 1973:156–7.

his publications were treatises (*kyan*) and guides (*lan hnyun*) on love, matrimony, and intimacy. These included: *A chit pyat lan* (Short-cut to love), *Kāma theidi kyan* (Treatise on the perfection of desire, 1931), *Thami goun yi* (A young woman's virtues), *Tha goun yi* (A young man's virtues), *A chit lan hnyun* (A lover's guide), *A pyo lan hnyun* (A maiden's guide, 1936), *Lu pyo lan hnyun* (A bachelor's guide), and *Mein ma seit kyan* (The psychology of women). While often addressed to young, *yaku khit* (present-day) men and women, who represented the first generation in Burma to benefit from mass literacy and formed the basis of an expanding—though primarily urban—reading public,[18] the intended audiences of these texts were both fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, and the young and the old. In the preface to *A chit lan hnyun* (A lover's guide), for example, Moe Nin maintained that the guide was meant not only for adolescents but also for their parents, who would be better equipped to give guidance to their children as a result of the text. As such, he hoped that the guide would be read by people of all ages, and "benefit intergenerational relations".[19]

None of the above titles have entered the list of his literary masterpieces. Some critics dismissed his discussion of relations between the sexes as indecent and characteristic of the work of a waning literary genius. Yet, his treatises proved to be extremely popular and were regarded as essential reading on the subject matter several decades after his death. For example, a selection of his shorter commentaries on '*a chit yei*' and '*ein daung yei*' (love and matrimonial affairs) were posthumously republished as *A chit abhidhamma thit* (The new lover's Abhidhamma, 1961), *Chit hmu yei ya* (Matters of love, 1962), and *A chit atwin yei* (Intimate matters of love, 1962).[20]

Moe Nin also wrote shorter pieces, such as "A chit seik sai ko lo gyi" (Psychology of love), in which he emphasized the vital importance of distinguishing love from lust.[21] Moe Nin begins the piece as follows:

> Love has a tendency to be tainted by *kilesa* (evil desire, defilements). The 1500 *kilesa* are often the root of love. These desires are not always evident in all instances of love. But even if *kilesa* do not manifest, they tend to exist hidden inside.[22]

18 For a detailed discussion of developments in literacy, print industry, and the popular press in interwar Burma, see Ikeya 2011:38–44, 55–9.

19 Moe Nin 2003:6.

20 Moe Nin 2003:155–7.

21 Moe Nin 2013b.

22 Moe Nin 2013b:152.

Moe Nin warns that even the 528 kinds of *mettā* (selfless loving kindness) among parents, children, and siblings are not free of *kilesa*. It is therefore to be expected, he claims, that all heterosexual relationships are tainted by *kilesa*.

He proceeds to compare and contrast relationships among adults and the youth. Having identified 14–15 year-old adolescents as clean and pure, he elaborates:

> Young men and women are content to simply be in each other's presence; being able to talk to one another and look each other in the face is like attaining nirvana! They have no desire to play fast and loose with each other nor do they have any unwholesome intentions. While a man 20 years or younger falls in love upon seeing a pretty face, an older man falls for a woman based on her bust, waist, hips, height, and, well, basically, her buxom body.[23]

Moe Nin adds, however, that *kilesa* also exists among the youth and, in fact, from a very young age. He gives the example of prepubescent boys and girls who fall for women or men who are 20–25 years older. Though the sexual organs of such boys and girls may not have matured, nor are their *kilesa* apparent, they can nevertheless take heavenly ('nirvana-like') pleasure in a mere embrace or a caressing touch by the older party.

In closing, Moe Nin turns his attention to same-sex relations. He points out that while love develops only between a man and a woman, prisoners, young students, and young women who do not have occasion to meet men do sometimes become lovers. "Since we know that true love is only possible between a man and a woman", Moe Nin posits, "same-sex relations in the name of love are really relations kindled by *kilesa*".[24] In other words, no form of intimacy—whether it be heterosocial or homosocial, heterosexual or homosexual, between a parent and a child, or between friends or lovers—is free from *kilesa*. One must be ever vigilant against carnal desire—defiled, selfish, and unwholesome—and not mistake it for authentic love, which is pure, selfless, and unconditional.

However, in *Kāma theidi kyan* (Treatise on the perfection of desire, hereafter referred to as *Perfection of desire*), published three years later, Moe Nin presents carnal desire and sexual fulfillment as wholesome and conducive of physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.[25] In fact, sexual

23 Moe Nin 2013b:153.
24 Moe Nin 2013b:155.
25 Moe Nin 1997.

enlightenment is presented as indispensable to lasting fulfillment in love and marriage.

In the preface, Moe Nin describes *Perfection of desire* as an objective, reasoned, and researched work based on his study of writings by European experts, thereby ensuring for himself an expert status. He does not specify to which 'European experts' he was referring. Yet, the content and form of the book make unavoidable the conclusion that he must have consulted, at the very least, Richard von Krafft-Ebing's best-selling *Psychopathia sexualis* (originally published in 1886 and in its twelfth edition by 1903)[26] and Havelock Ellis' multivolume *Studies in the psychology of sex* (1897–1910),[27] works that Moe Nin would have undoubtedly come across as a student of psychology. In all likelihood, he would have also drawn on Marie C. Stopes' *Married love: A new contribution to the solution of sex difficulties*, a bestseller that had sold more than half million copies by 1925.[28] In fact, *Perfection of desire* reads like a synthetic adaptation of these texts, combining insights, information, and styles of medico-scientific sexological works (Krafft-Ebing and Ellis) and the more populist genre of advice manuals (Stopes), and fusing 'the science of sex' with 'the art of love'.

As with these and other turn of the century sexological texts, *Perfection of desire* includes a description of: the male and female genital organs, 'erogenic zones', physiology of erection, ejaculation, orgasm, and impregnation; 'love-play' or foreplay, positions and attitudes during and after coitus; sexual cycles for men and women, sexual maturity, menstruation, impotence, frigidity, infertility, and menopause; sexuality in children, puberty, autoerotism, and masturbation; the distinction between 'the sexual instinct' and 'the instinct of procreation'; how to choose a partner; how to control procreation; the causes and symptoms of premature labour, miscarriage, and venereal diseases, and how to prevent or treat these disorders (see Table 1 for the table of contents). What is missing, notably, is a discussion of 'sexual

26 Von Krafft-Ebing 1886.

27 The six-volume work, published between 1897 and 1910, included: *Sexual inversion* (1897); *The evolution of modesty: The phenomena of sexual periodicity: Auto-eroticism* (1900); *Analysis of the sexual impulse* (1903); *Sexual selection in man* (1905); *Erotic symbolism*: *The mechanism of detumescence*: *The psychic state of pregnancy* (1906); and *Sex in relation to society* (1910). As a side note, Moe Nin's discussion of *kilesa* among the youth in "The psychology of love" also bears close resemblance to Ellis' analysis of "precocious sexual impulses" in volume six of *Studies in the psychology of sex*.

28 Stopes 1918. Her *Enduring passion: Further new contributions to the solution of sex difficulties being the continuation of married love* (Stopes 1928) might also have served as a key source.

TABLE 7.1 Table of contents, Moe Nin, *Treatise on the perfection of desire* (1931)

Preface
1. A husband's prosperity
2. Diseases and treatments
3. Treatments for small penis
4. Low sexual drive
5. First sexual intercourse
6. Sexual dysfunction and disease
7. Gonorrhea
8. Syphilis
9. Fertility
10. Miscarriage
11. Contraception
12. Amenorrhea and menorrhagia
13. What turns women on
14. How to tell if a woman really loves you
15. The female hormone cycle
16. Special role of women's breasts
17. What turns men on
18. How to strengthen your marital bond
19. Age and sexual desire
20. Harmonious marriages
21. Four kinds of husbands
22. Menstruation
23. How to live a long life
Epilogue

abnormality' or 'aberrations', considered briefly in "Psychology of love"—a conspicuous omission in light of the fact that sexology in the 'West' (by which I mean Europe, the United States and Japan) developed primarily as a scientific study of sexual perversion that produced compendia of aberrant sexual typologies and classifications such as exhibitionism, sadism, masochism, homosexuality, sexual inversion, transvestism, voyeurism, narcissism, erotic fetishism, and nymphomania that, in turn, informed a larger 'invention of heterosexuality'.[29]

29 Katz 1991; Frühstück 2003.

Also mirroring contemporary sexological texts, *Perfection of desire* begins with a justification for its publication.[30] Anticipating, rightly, that the book would be criticized for its frank discussion of sex, Moe Nin clarified his motivation for writing it as follows:

> Sexual fulfillment in marriage is not something that has received attention in discussions of the key ingredients for a happy and successful marriage. Yet, the most important thing in one's life is the question of *kāma* (carnal desire). This is a desire that no normal human being can be free of and thus is an essential question for one's psychological well-being. There is a popular misconception that sex is dirty; that ignorance of and disinterest in sexual matters is a virtue and signifies a pure and clean mind. There are those who, out of embarrassment, shun sexological (*pinnya* of *kāma*) writings. But carnal knowledge is not a sin. In fact, refusing knowledge and understanding of sex is the biggest sin.[31]

He concludes by indicating that he has written the treatise for the benefit of Burmese people who, like ships trying to navigate seas without a map or compass, are badly in need of guidance and direction. Like his contemporaries, Moe Nin forcefully proclaimed "the quest for truth" as his goal, and presented himself as a progressive reformer disabusing his people of unscientific, traditional, and unenlightened views and mentalities.[32]

In Chapter 1 ("A husband's prosperity"), Moe Nin fleshes out these points, elaborating on why marriage will last only when both man and wife are

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30 Most pioneering sexological texts the world over were denounced as obscene and pornographic, despite the effort by their authors to justify their works as legitimate, scientific studies of human sexual behaviour. As Ellis (1905:vi–vii) explained in the preface to the first volume of *Studies in the psychology of sex*, the sexologist could: "take for granted that any serious and precise study of the sexual instinct will not meet with general approval; his work will be misunderstood; his motives will be called in question [...] indeed, the pioneer in this field may well count himself happy if he meets with nothing worse than indifference".

31 Moe Nin 1997:i-ii.

32 Take, for example, the best-selling *Encyclopaedia of sexual knowledge* by Arthur Koestler, Willy Aldor, and Levy-Lenz, published just two years after *Perfection of desire* under the pen name of Dr. A. Costler and "A. Willy", and under the editorship of Norman Haire, a member of the British Sexology Society. In his preface to the book, Haire explains that despite the large volume of popular books on sex that had been published recently in England, "sexual ignorance is still so general, and the mass of misery arising therefrom so enormous and so appalling, that I welcome all additions to the list of volumes offering a measure of sexual enlightenment": Costler, Willy, and others 1934:vii.

sexually fulfilled. He identifies the man as the active party—the 'doer'—in a conjugal relationship but insists that the sexual desires of the wife must also be actively met:

> If, during intercourse, the husband experiences an orgasm before the wife experiences hers, then not only will she sleep poorly but also begin to loathe him. When this feeling of dissatisfaction is extreme, it leads to adultery, which in turn leads to physical and psychological suffering. Symptoms can be as extreme as witchcraft or epilepsy. In most marriages I have encountered, husbands are selfish and inconsiderate in this manner; only his sexual needs matter and the wife lives in misery. Such unhappy marriages abound. In fact, there are many wives who die without ever having experienced conjugal bliss![33]

In the pages that follow, Moe Nin explains that a wife should not assume that she won't get pregnant because she does not experience sexual pleasure; pregnancy occurs when the male sperm meets the female egg. He suggests that when a sexually dissatisfied wife endures the pain and labour of pregnancy and childbirth, she can become resentful of her husband. Yet, a wife does not know how to openly air her frustrations and unhappiness. The husband, mistaking her quiet suffering as a deliberate and undeserved attempt at annoying him, begins to resent her: "What reason does she have to be unhappy? I work hard all day to provide for her and buy her all the clothes and jewelry she could want". He thus places all the blame on the wife, who finds herself disillusioned, Moe Nin indicates. She was raised to believe that a woman, upon marriage, will finally come to know conjugal bliss. But as it turns out, she not only experiences no sexual gratification but also finds herself with a husband increasingly frustrated with and prone to mistreating her. The result: "She feels like packing her bags and going home to her mother".[34]

"This guide is written with the hope that it will help prevent such tragedies", Moe Nin submits. He continues:

> Marriage is the most important thing in life. But if you don't have the knowledge that you need to go on this important journey—like setting out on a journey into a mountainous jungle in the dark and without a map—then your life will come to resemble hell. Without this essential

33 Moe Nin 1997:2.

34 Moe Nin 1997:4.

> knowledge, you will not only be prevented from indulging in conjugal pleasure but will have to suffer *dukkha* (unhappiness). I offer this book with the hope that it will serve as a guiding light, and hope that readers, for the sake of human prosperity, health, and happiness, will make use of it instead of denouncing it.[35]

In sum, enlightened knowledge and understanding of sex is essential to harmony, happiness, and lasting fulfillment in love and marriage. Passion alone cannot ground conjugal love. But a passionless marriage lacking in mutual sexual satisfaction is not true conjugal love.

In the following chapter on "Diseases and treatments", Moe Nin gives a detailed description of the male and female anatomies, sexual organs, and reproductive cycles, pointing out what is normal and abnormal, and healthy and unhealthy. For example, Moe Nin discusses pre- and post-menstrual syndromes for women and, for men, spermatorrhea, impotence and premature ejaculation. As treatment, he strongly recommends Ayurvedic medicine, particularly asafetida; in addition to taking it orally, he advises the men to massage a mixture of powdered asafetida and ghee over the shaft of the penis and wrap the area with betel leaves.[36] He also expounds on the various ways in which a husband can help his wife achieve sexual pleasure and orgasm during intercourse, especially oral stimulation.

One aspect of this chapter is worth highlighting: Moe Nin's emphasis on the importance of the sexual health of *both* husband and wife. In particular, he details the vital importance of foreplay, stressing, for instance, that a husband should not rush penetration and should stimulate his wife's clitoris for several minutes before penetration. He insists that it is a myth that women should be passive during sex and encourages the wife to actively move her body in such a way that gives her pleasure. He is especially emphatic that husband and wife should either orgasm simultaneously or that the husband ensure that his wife does so before he orgasms. This, he states, is the secret to a happy and fulfilling marriage.[37]

Two other chapters of *Perfection of desire* stand out: Chapters 18 ("How to strengthen your marital bond") and 20 ("Harmonious marriages"). Chapter 18 recommends that a couple not fixate on each other's positive characteristics

35 Moe Nin 1997:4–5.

36 Moe Nin 1997:18–9. Moe Nin recommends other remedies, for instance, instructing husbands to show understanding for their ailing wives and suggesting phosphorous for men suffering from sexual dysfunction.

37 Moe Nin 1997:10–7.

but, instead, figure out each other's faults and weaknesses prior to marriage. He advises on the appropriate space that a husband and wife should give each other, noting that there can be such a thing as too much time together. Most striking is his position on female chastity. Moe Nin points out that most men assume that their wives are virgins at the time of marriage and take great pride in this. "But what if she turns out not to be a virgin? Can you accept it?", he asks.[38] He states that a husband should make acceptance his goal. Moe Nin proceeds to question the value of virginity, arguing that it is not an important factor in marriage. "A virgin wife is no guarantee that the marriage won't be unhappy", he states, adding: "there is no reason to believe that only a virgin wife makes for a happy marriage".[39] According to him, virginity neither makes nor breaks a marriage. Importantly, he posits that this is the case whether or not the wife has lost her virginity voluntarily or involuntarily. It does not matter if she lost her virginity knowingly or foolishly as a careless youth, or whether or not she regrets having lost her virginity. What really matters in a marriage, concludes Moe Nin, is mutual respect, understanding, and honesty.[40]

Chapter 20 reiterates and reinforces much of what Moe Nin puts forth in Chapter 18, that is, that the recipe for a successful marriage includes mutual respect, understanding, and honesty. He makes two interesting additions. First, the key to a harmonious marriage is to avoid living with one's parents. He identifies the presence of in-laws (whether they be mothers- or sisters-in-law) as one of the main causes of marital discord. Their proximity prevents a couple from freely and sufficiently indulging in the pleasures of conjugality. It hinders open and honest communication between husband and wife. The burden of having to please in-laws creates unnecessary stress for the wife. Moe Nin asserts that a man should marry only when he has achieved financial independence and is able to afford his own home.[41] Secondly, Moe Nin emphasizes the need for the husband to show appreciation for his wife's household work. He points out that Burmese society has, in the past, had a tendency to devalue domestic labour. But times have changed, he argues, and husbands and wives of modern times must give each other constant support, admiration, and appreciation.[42]

38 Moe Nin 1997:93.
39 Moe Nin 1997:94.
40 Moe Nin 1997:94–5.
41 Moe Nin 1997:98–100.
42 Moe Nin 1997:100–2.

Family Romance: Sexual Pleasure, Female Desire, and Conjugal Intimacy

Moe Nin's treatises on love and matrimonial affairs were pioneering modern sexological texts, distinguished by their scientific approach, self-identification as 'objective' and 'expert', and medicalization of sex and affect. According to them, sexuality was constitutive of the self and frank discussion of sex was a sign of modern subjectivity.[43] They also represented formulations of the companionate marriage ideal, premised on personal desire and satisfaction, rather than duty, obligation, and a reproductive mandate. According to Moe Nin, the modern husband and wife enjoyed privacy, relative equality, and physical, sexual and emotional intimacy and companionship. Last but not least, Moe Nin fashioned new visions of the family that emphasized a bounded nuclear family that gave greater priority to the 'intimate couple' and challenged an extended or joint family composed of multigenerational kinship.

It is not only in *Perfection of desire* that the relationship between husband and wife figures as the central axis of affect within families. Many of his short stories likewise give primacy to the heterosexual, conjugal affective unit as the primary locus of family decision-making while devaluing other modalities of intimacy, signifying the emergence of what has been termed the 'conjugal family ideal'.[44] Take, for instance, "Yi zā dā mya" (Banditry of love),[45] a tale of love between a wealthy *dā mya* (bandit) Maung Ba Htun and Ma Thant Nyunt, a genteel daughter of a once well-to-do family in decline. Upon obtaining a college degree in agriculture in Western India, Maung Ba Htun returns to the lawless district of Tharawaddy and succeeds in gaining the respect and allegiance of local bandits and outlaws, becoming a powerful overlord. When he learns that Ma Thant Nyunt, who has just lost her father, and her widowed mother, Daw Hla, intend to visit him, he assumes that the women are in search of a rich husband or benefactor. He hatches up a plot to change place with his retainer, Maung Zaw, and observe the behaviour of the two women. Predictably, Daw Hla, convinced that Maung Zaw is the wealthy overlord, urges her

43 There were erotologic texts and sex manuals in early modern and pre-colonial Burma but they do not appear to have these characteristics associated with modern sexological texts. That said, almost no research has been conducted on erotic literature or sex manuals in premodern Burma. Such research may problematize the Foucauldian dichotomy of "*scientia sexualis*" and "*ars erotica*", that is, the Orientalist assumption that in Europe knowledge of the body was produced through scientific discourse, whereas in "the East" the body was experienced through pleasure as an erotic art.

44 Coontz 2006; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Sreenivas 2008; Cole and Thomas 2009.

45 Moe Nin 2010.

daughter to marry him, while Ma Thant Nyunt and Maung Ba Htun begin to fall for one another. At one point in the story, Ma Thant Nyunt declares defiantly to her mother that she does not care if Maung Ba Htun—or any man for that matter—is rich or poor; she is not in love with money, she is in love with the individual. In the end, Maung Ba Htun's true identity is revealed, Daw Hla agrees to her daughter's marriage to him, the couple have two children and live happily ever after in their flourishing village.

In "Banditry of love", as in other love stories,[46] the modern love marriage epitomizes truth, freedom, agency, and progress; it is a model of relations untainted by economic and political interest, calculation, and exchange. It is pitted against and supersedes the family-negotiated or arranged marriage—with or without the consent of the individuals getting married—in which personal desire and fulfillment are subordinated to the material and financial concerns and demands of parents and relatives (often, though not exclusively, the matriarch). To be clear, it was not uncommon at the time that Moe Nin was writing for Burmese men and women to marry without the approval of their families and/or to set up independent households. Additionally, there is little evidence to suggest that Burmese society, long characterized by bilateral inheritance and both matrifocal and patrifocal practices and relations, was ever matriarchal.[47] The marital and familial arrangements that Moe Nin glorified—those governed by ideals of romantic companionship and the nuclear family and subverted, in particular, matriarchal authority—were therefore not unprecedented. They did, however, represent a new hegemonic family that privileged sentiment, choice, and individualism over social obligation, and the husband-wife bond over that of the mother-daughter. In other words, Moe Nin's love/sexual revolution may have promised liberation and progress. But it also served to discipline marriage, family, kinship, gender and sexuality, and stigmatize putatively

46 For other examples, see Moe Nin 2013c, 2013d.

47 A thorough historical study of marriage and family in early modern and colonial Burma has yet to be written, making impossible any secure claims about the prevalence or importance of (semi)arranged marriages and matriarchy in Burma prior to the twentieth century. My examination of nineteenth and twentieth century Burmese civil court records dealing with marriage, divorce, inheritance, and other family disputes—such as the Indian Law Reports (Rangoon Series) and Upper and Lower Burma Rulings—suggests that family-arranged marriages were no more nor less common than other forms of marriage, such as eloping. It also supports the emphasis that the current literature on the Burmese family has placed on bilateral inheritance and matrifocality. See Andaya 2006; Furnivall 1911; Maung Maung 1963; Mi Mi Khaing 1962; Nash and Nash 1963.

'unenlightened', 'oppressive', and 'traditional' modalities of intimacy in the name of emancipating love and sex.[48]

In some ways, these developments are not particularly unique. Elsewhere in the early twentieth century, "medical doctors, pedagogues, and sex educators invoked the (necessity of) the liberation of sex in order to shed oppressive traditional beliefs and to unburden sex of mystification".[49] The growing body of mostly male 'experts' propagated various 'truths' about sex that they had uncovered, such as the sexual ignorance, insensitivity and ineptitude of men; unnaturalness of female frigidity (and the discovery of the desiring female); the necessity of foreplay and oral stimulation; and the vital importance of mutual—and preferably simultaneous!—sexual pleasure. They campaigned for the popularization, among the masses, of the knowledge of these sexual discoveries. At the same time that they advocated the scientific, biomedical management of intimate matters, they condemned sexual attitudes and behaviours, and reproductive methods—often feminized social practices centered around women elders, midwives, and healers—that were deemed indigenous and anti-modern.[50]

By the 1920s, the idea that neither love without sexuality, nor sexual pleasure without love was complete had become widespread among sexologists, signalling a shift from the procreative norm to the pleasure principle. As Ellis explained, a harmonious sexual relationship had "liberating and harmonising [sic] influences" on a marriage, allowing "a deeper spiritual unity [...] than can possibly be derived from continence in or out of marriage".[51] This eroticization and sexualization of marriage and love was a trend that would continue, as evinced by the enduring popularity of Stopes' *Married love* and similar advice manuals published subsequently by other authors.[52]

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48 On the structuring of legitimate intimacy through the liberal, binary concepts of individual freedom and social constraint, see Elizabeth Povinelli's analysis (2006) of the systematic relations between forms of love and forms of liberal governance in liberal settler colonies.

49 Frühstück 2003:5. Also see Ahluwalia 2008; Briggs 2002; Chiang 2010; Hansen 1992; Hunt 1999.

50 Marie Stopes was a notable exception. She was unsympathetic, even opposed, to the male-dominated medical profession, which she blamed for the widespread ignorance about love and sex, as the following excerpt from *Married love* shows: "so many distinguished medical men, gynecologists and physiologists, are either in ignorance or error regarding some of the profoundest facts of human sex-life, that it is not surprising that ordinary young couples, however hopeful, should break and destroy the joy that might have been their lifelong companion" (Stopes 1918:13).

51 Ellis 1922:68.

52 For example, Hannah and Abraham Stone's *A marriage manual: A practical guide-book to sex and marriage* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1935), written and published by the

From the United States, England and South Africa to Japan, Siam, China, and Malaya, debates on 'true' versus 'false' love and marriage often turned on issues of companionship and gender equality as contemporaries tried to come to grips with new conceptions of romantic and conjugal love that prioritized sexual pleasure. In response to questions about what constituted authentic love, many theorists referred to the selfless and all-encompassing love of a mother for her children. Moe Nin, like many others, claimed that love could not be bought, and divorced it from consumerism and materialism. In general, medico-scientific and popular literature on love and sex shared the concern about how to build enduring and harmonious marriages, and claimed that affective ties between husbands and wives superseded those of multigenerational kin and relatives. In addition to the privileging of the 'intimate couple' and the private, conjugal family, Moe Nin shared with his contemporaries his decidedly middle-class, heterosexual focus. Like much of the populist sex and marriage advice literature of the time, his "reinforced the idea that heterosexual marriage, along middle-class lines, was and ought to be a central institution of society".[53] By maligning matriarchal authority and emphasizing the commanding role of the husband (cast in the role of the 'breadwinner', while the 'stay-at-home wife' was relegated to the separate sphere of domesticity), Moe Nin, furthermore, elevated the status not only of middle-class, heteronormative marriage but also patriarchal family and masculine agency.[54]

Clearly, his study in psychology, a field then dominated by researchers of sex and sexuality, had left an indelible mark on his intellectual orientation and literary production. As a reader of English-language novels and advice literature—Moe Nin was, after all, Burma's foremost translator and author of self-help books—he would presumably have developed a strong familiarity with emergent notions of heterosexual, conjugal love that recognized sex and romance as healthy and necessary components of marriage. It is entirely possible that texts such as *Perfection of desire* and "The psychology of love" were in large part translations and adaptations into Burmese of popular English-language sexological and marriage advice literature.

Moe Nin may also have been drawing on neo-Malthusian, 'social hygiene' and feminist eugenicist movements that viewed reproduction and conjugal sexuality as important public—and national—concerns. As the convening of

husband-and-wife physician team, had already gone through 29 printings and been translated into numerous foreign languages, according to the preface to the 1952 edition (Stone and Stone 1952).

53 Hall 1998.

54 For comparative cases, see Cole and Thomas 2009; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Sang 2003; Majumdar 2009; Sreenivas 2008.

the International Eugenics Congresses in 1912, 1921, and 1932 indicate, eugenics emerged globally as a scientific pursuit in the first decades of the twentieth century, as heated debates over degeneracy and population decline took place.[55] At the same time, campaigns to uplift the working class out of poverty and emancipate women from involuntary motherhood and social inequity expanded. In neighbouring British India, the first eugenics societies and birth control clinic were established by 1921; by the mid-1930s, Aliyappin Padmanabha Pillay, an influential Indian sexologist and birth control activist, had founded the Bombay based international journal *Marriage Hygiene*, judged by contemporaries such as Ellis as one of the leading English-language journals on sexology.[56] Although there is scant evidence of similar developments in Burma, we know that Burma was also part of the international birth control circuit. When the British and American feminist birth control advocates Edith How-Martyn and Margaret Sanger took their 'Oriental' tour in the winter of 1935–1936 to survey the state of contraception, they made a stop in Rangoon.[57] What impact, if any, did such social 'hygiene' movements have on Moe Nin?

Interestingly, Moe Nin does not exhibit Malthusian concerns with reproduction and overpopulation demonstrated by early male advocates of birth control and experts on sexual knowledge in, for example, neighbouring India and China.[58] He does not make overt gestures to tether sexuality to national well-being; nor does he call for surveillance of the reproductive behaviours of subaltern groups—working class, poor, the uneducated, or otherwise 'unfit' subjects—who tended to be stereotyped as sexually irresponsible. The noticeable absence of pronatalist propaganda and eugenicist agenda in Moe Nin's sexological writings is all the more conspicuous given the unmistakable ways that he had been influenced by the works of Ellis, a supporter of eugenics who served as the president of the Galton Institute and the vice president of the Eugenic Education Society.

Other aspects of Moe Nin's sexological turn stand out. Unlike most pioneering psychologists and sexologists of the time, including both 'amateur' and established experts with institutional affiliations, Moe Nin never undertook original research. He did not conduct surveys or establish question-and-answer

55 For a transnational history of eugenics, see Bashford and Levine 2010; Bashford 2014.

56 For eugenics and birth control movements in British India, see Ahluwalia 2008.

57 Edith How-Martyn, travel notes compiled during her visit to Burma with Margaret Sanger, 3–6 February 1936, in: British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Eileen Palmer Collection, MSS Eur D.1182/3; Edith How-Martyn, "Contraception in the Orient", written after the tour of India with Margaret Sanger in the winter of 1935–1936, in: British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, Eileen Palmer Collection, MSS Eur D.1182/26.

58 Ahluwalia 2008; Dikötter 1998.

columns in papers he edited to solicit and respond to queries about sex or love. Nor did he found a sexological journal or magazine. He did not give lectures on love or sex, nor did he initiate or become involved in movements for sex education.

In fact, Moe Nin's work seems quite exceptional in many ways, especially in light of the colonial context in which he was writing. Indigenous intellectuals, writers and editors in turn-of-the-century colonial societies tended to avoid explicit descriptions of sex out of fear of harming their own respectability or that of their community. They were concerned, in particular, about reinforcing sexualized racist stereotypes of colonized men and women (as unchaste, immoral, and oversexed).[59] Moe Nin, despite his candid sex talk, may have shared this concern. As I indicated above, his discussion of sexual 'perversions' was relatively limited, possibly reflecting his reluctance to reify colonial discourses of colonized subjects as sexual others.

Yet, if this was the case, it makes all the more remarkable Moe Nin's invocation of female sexuality and desire. This is perhaps what is most striking about his writings: his insistence on making both affective and sexual experience the hallmark of an individualized *female* subjectivity, despite the social and political conservatism around female sexuality at this time.[60] Admittedly, special journal issues on female sexual desire were being produced in Japan by the early 1920s.[61] In China, the university professor, sex educator and China's 'Dr. Sex', Zhang Jingsheng (1888–1970), popularized the view of women as active sexual agents (in heterosexual intercourse). At the same time, May Fourth women writers such as Lu Yin challenged the dominant trend of pathologizing same-sex desire in Republican China and gave limited cultural legitimacy to female same-sex desire.[62] But these appear to have been exceptions in much of Asia and other colonized parts of the world where comparable invocations of the autonomous, desiring and self-achieving female subject were found only a decade or two later. For example, Sanjam Ahluwalia has shown in her pathbreaking historical study of birth control in British India that Indian middle-class men and women, even feminists, advocated a form of sexual puritanism that idealized a self-sacrificial, self-effacing femininity and foreclosed the possibility of female sexual expressions within

59 Thomas 2009; Levine 2004.

60 As I have shown in my analysis of critiques of the sexual and sartorial practices of modern Burmese women in literary, political and journalistic texts, the autonomous, desiring, and self-achieving female subject was widely criticized as frivolous, self-indulgent, and unpatriotic (Ikeya 2011).

61 Frühstück 2003:100–9.

62 Sang 2003; Chiang 2010.

or outside matrimony. Not until 1944—more than a decade after the publication of Moe Nin's *Perfection of desire*—did the aforementioned Indian sexologist A.P. Pillay publish a text that placed emphasis on mutual sexual fulfillment in marriage and "recognized that women were not merely passive objects of male desires within matrimony".[63] Even then, Pillay limited women's sexuality to marriage and maternity.[64] It is not until the 1950s and 1960s in post-Independence India that we encounter portrayals of feminine desire and sexuality in the print media by women writers such as Chudamani Raghavan and Mannu Bhandari.[65]

To be sure, in *Perfection of desire,* too, marriage circumscribed women's—and men's—sexuality. It is not entirely implausible that Moe Nin, like many early male sexologists the world over, sought to enforce 'compulsory heterosexuality' under the guise of affirming female sexual desire. Yet, by keeping female sexuality within the bounds of marriage, Moe Nin may have hoped to make palatable to a wide audience the potentially controversial aspects of his book, such as his blunt critique of men's (husbands') tendency towards selfishness, ignorance and ineptitude in matters sexual; his decoupling of sex from reproduction; and his proposal for a novel paradigm of conjugal emotion that challenged existing norms of domestic and familial relations.[66]

It is also worth pointing out the double meaning of the Burmese words Moe Nin most frequently used to refer to husband (*yauk kya*) and wife (*mein ma*). Unlike terms such as *lin*/*maung hnan* (husband) and *mayā*/*zanī* (wife) that can only refer to husband or wife, and are often used as pairs (*lin mayā*, *zanī maung hnan*), the terms *yauk kya* and *mein ma* can also mean a male and female person, respectively, and are actually used most commonly in the latter sense.[67] Moe Nin's decision to employ *yauk kya* and *mein ma* far more regularly than the other unambiguous terms might signify an attempt to be inclusive of non-marital intimacies, rather than restrict sex to marriage. At the very least, it raises questions concerning his intentions and motivations. Was Moe Nin

63 Ahluwalia 2008:151.

64 Ahluwalia 2008:85–114, 151.

65 Mani 2016.

66 Porter and Hall argue for this interpretation. They suggest that authors of Victorian and post-Victorian marriage advice literature such as Marie Stopes and Isabel Hutton, "[by] being very careful to state that they were talking only about sex between persons of the opposite sex legitimately married to one another [...] were able to discuss such delicate topics as 'the genital kiss' and to give details for accomplishing variant sexual positions" (Porter and Hall 1995:217).

67 Accordingly, these words are defined in Burmese dictionaries as, first, man/male and woman/female. The second entries for these words are husband and wife.

trying to secure middle-class, heteronormative marriage as the only legitimate site of adult intimacy? What lay behind his effort to modernize existing regimes of sex, love, marriage and family in Burma?

Psycho-Historicizing the Intimate Reformer

Scholarship on the 'hegemony of love' suggests that global shifts in marriage and family ideals and, specifically, the dominance of the ideology of marital love, were intimately tied to the Enlightenment project of contractual constitutional democracy, the emergence of new market relations in mercantile and industrial capitalism, and the rise of bourgeoisies.[68] One strand of this scholarship has emphasized the rise of market, wage-based economies and liberal forms of governance. It argues that the challenge to feudalism, family-based agricultural production and absolutist states made possible the forging of relationships based on non-instrumental, emotional attachments between autonomous self-making subjects. The feminist strand has analysed the romantic companionate ideal as an ideology that serves to reinforce another constructed ideology, that of separate spheres. The modern conjugal family thus masks the actual entanglement of the masculinized public world of productivity and politics with the feminized domestic realm of reproductive labour.[69]

As I have shown in my previous research, in Burma as elsewhere, the rise of novel domestic ideals intersected with the development of novel market economies.[70] The turn-of-the-century emergence of new patterns of consumption also helped to make iterations of the primacy of conjugal love and intimacy possible and acceptable. Consumer capitalism's emphasis on pleasure, self-actualization and self-gratification as markers of progress and success, promoted through the popular press and the cinema, helped to launch and promote reconfigurations of intimate relations.[71] In other words, love and sex articulated with the organization of both production and consumption. But 'the domestic domain' was—and is—neither a simple reflection nor an extension of economic structures and relations; it is reductive to simply link the development of particular marriage and family norms and practices to certain modes of production and consumption.

68 See, for example, Coontz 2006; Hirsch and Wardlow 2006; Povinelli 2006.
69 Kerber 1998.
70 Ikeya 2011.
71 Ikeya 2011:96–119.

Historians of marriage, family and intimacy in South and Southeast Asia have also asked, rightly, what difference the colonial context made.[72] They have made significant progress in analysing the ideological deployment of the family in anticolonial and nationalist politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the ineluctably intertwined process of 'imagining' women, domesticities and nations. The late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries were, of course, the height of the age of global empire and coincided with imperial states' intensifying policing of their subjects' sexual behaviour and health. In Burma as in other colonies, marriage and the family were targets for state regulation and sites for the exercise of colonial authority. In the memorable words of Ann Stoler, matters of intimacy were matters of state.[73] At the same time, for reformers, activists, politicians, and intellectuals, the home and the family became the grounds from which to defend native societies and cultures from colonial intervention as well as sites for defining and debating conceptions of the nation and national identity.[74] It is precisely this anticolonial/nationalist demarcation of the 'private sphere' as a sovereign domain—a repository of authentic tradition and nation—from which to resist and critique 'Western', colonial modernity, that makes intriguing Moe Nin's emphatic argument for reforming marital and domestic arrangements.

Here was an individual with no real interest in supporting the colonial state, mobilizing ideas about 'proper' affect, sociality and intimacy at odds with 1930s' nationalist political discourse on Westernization and colonial modernity. So what motivated him to produce reformist, modernist literature on sex and marriage, and desire and intimacy?

Any interpretation of Moe Nin's intentions and motivations must necessarily be somewhat speculative since he does not discuss his corpus on intimate modernity in his autobiography. It must also remain provisional until a comprehensive study of his entire oeuvre has been undertaken. However, it seems fairly safe to say that Moe Nin was a social reformer who identified marriage, family and relations between the sexes as targets of intervention. That one of his closest friends and mentors was the famed scholar-monk turned editor, writer and pioneering advocate of female education and authorship in Burma, Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi (1878–1939), is probably no coincidence. He introduced the genre of the 'women's column' in Burma and was instrumental in

72 See, for example, Loos 2006; Majumdar 2009; Sreenivas 2008.

73 Stoler 2002.

74 Chatterjee 1993; Loos 2006; Sarkar 2001; Sreenivas 2008. In Burma, this dynamic played out most discernibly in the debate over intermarriage, especially between Burmese Buddhist women and non-Buddhists (Ikeya 2011:120–42).

facilitating discussions on the 'woman question', that is, whether and which conditions of women's lives needed reform.[75] Both men envisioned a new egalitarian model of gender dynamics in a changing Burma. Both idealized the modern man/woman as a self-realizing, self-improving individual. Unlike Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi, however, Moe Nin called attention to the intimate as a pivotal point of debate about society.

Given his seminary training, it is tempting to regard Moe Nin as a Christian reformer, molded fundamentally by missionary efforts to instill 'Western' family ideology, civilize gender and sexual norms and practices, and restructure native households in the colonies.[76] But his writings exhibit both Christian and Buddhist inflections. Take, for instance, his postulation of a dichotomy and tension between non-instrumental love and an instrumentalist love that is premised on the nonaffective, material and strategic interests of kinship. This idea might be attributed to the Christian, Eurocentric ideology of love that tends to ignore the ways that intimate social attachments, materiality and exchange are, in fact, deeply intertwined. Yet, such a view probably resonated with Buddhist ideologies and discourses, edified in narrative (*jataka*) and other normative literature (*vinaya*), that similarly expounded on the dangers of desire and worldly attachments, as his commentary on *kilesa* in "*A chit seik sai-ko-lo-gyi*" suggests. In fact, Moe Nin's reformulation of the intimate defies any straightforward narrative of the globalization of (Eurocentric) modern ideologies of love, marriage and family. It likewise resists attempts to theorize intimate modernity as the (biomedical) colonization of sex and intimacy, whereby scientific authority and restraint replace religious command.

It seems only fitting to end an inquiry into the motivations of Burma's literary sexologist/love psychologist extraordinaire by returning to his life story. Given his own struggle with celibacy, it is not hard to imagine that Moe Nin had a keen personal as well as intellectual interest in exploring 'the psychology of sex', and then making it accessible to Burmese society.[77] This would not have been unheard of. After all, what motivated Stopes to publish

75 Ikeya 2011:59–74. Incidentally, the erstwhile scholar-monk was, like Moe Nin, once a disciple of Ledi Sayadaw. Unlike Moe Nin, however, Ledi Pandita U Maung Gyi spent decades, not just a couple of years, in the sangha.

76 There now exists a voluminous literature that documents the ways that "the home" has functioned as a crucial site of missionization and colonization: see, for example, Clancy-Smith and Gouda 1998; Hansen 1992; Hunt 1999.

77 Ellis' *Studies in the psychology of sex*—in which Ellis asserts that asceticism and chastity "demand our estimation, but not our over-estimation"—may very well have contributed to Moe Nin's decision to abandon his seminary training. See Ellis 1910:177.

Married love was her firsthand experience of sexual problems in her first marriage, which ended in annulment due to non-consummation (her first husband turned out to be impotent). Moe Nin too may have been impelled by his own experiences, at the same time that he was inspired by works such as those by Stopes and Ellis. His autobiography is telling in this regard: there are multiple instances in which Moe Nin is unable to mobilize appropriate cultural scripts to express his frustrations with and anxieties about intimate relations, whether they were with his friends, lovers, wives or mother figures. In most of these cases, and as exemplified by his first marriage, his solution was to run away. He may have found in the modern episteme of love and sex a language with which to express in novel, 'rational', and socially acceptable terms his intimate sexual, affective, and familial experiences and struggles.

Post-Colonial Postscript: The Afterlife of Moe Nin's Intimate Modernity

At the time of his death in 1940, Moe Nin was no longer a lonely pioneer in the field of literary sexology and love psychology in Burma. *A chit gaṇ ṭhi* (Glossary of love) by the novelist and journalist Dagon Nat Shin was published in 1934 (and reprinted in 1938).[78] Ko Than Maung's *Chit neibban tho* (To the nirvana of love) and Saya U Aye Maung's *Loki boun* (Sex life), published immediately after the end of World War Two in 1945, were both reprinted within a year. The latter was in its third edition by Burma's independence in 1948, with glowing reviews of the book published by the most influential Burmese newspapers, magazines and journals at the time.[79] Also in 1948, Thin Kar published both *Thin ein daung yei kyi pwa ni* (How to have a successful marriage) and *Seik pyinnya hnit kāma pyatthana* (Psychology and the problem of desire).[80]

Like Moe Nin, the authors of these various texts rendered sex a natural, essential and powerful part of human life. They preached the significance of sexuality to the health and well-being of the individual, family and society, and espoused conjugal intimacy and marital eroticism. Unlike Moe Nin, however, most of them claimed that their works were based on their own experience and firsthand knowledge. Only Saya U Aye Maung—the sole medical doctor

78 Nat Shin 1938.
79 Than Maung 1946; Aye Maung 1948.
80 Thin Kar 1948a, 1948b.

among these authors—based his book on the works of other experts such as Ellis, Stopes, Norman Haire (a protégé of Ellis and a prominent British sexologist) and M.N. Ganesa Aiyer (an Indian author who published several popular sexological books in the 1930s). His citation of foreign experts and professional sexologists might have distinguished the book from its competitors and contributed to its outstanding success.

In the preface to the third edition of Saya U Aye Maung's *Loki boun*, the former chief editor of *Mandalay Thuriya* (Mandalay Sun), Maung Tin, concludes his tribute to the book as follows:

> I pray that not only will there be more writers of sex like U Aye Maung in the near future, but also that women writers like Marie Stopes, the authors of *Married love*, too, would appear in Burma soon.[81]

Women would eventually enter the field of literary sexology, though not until the 1960s, when Sayama Khin Myo Wei's *Lu a twin yay shou hwek chek mya* (Sexology 1) and Khin Khin Kyo's *Chit seik lein seik* (Sexology) appeared.[82] These, however, were readers of sorts, comprising selections of foreign sexological works, translated into Burmese, with introductions and notes. Even as Burma entered the twilight of its sexological turn, Maung Tin's prayer for Stopes-esque women sexologists appear to have gone unanswered.[83] Strangely, none of these texts referenced the works of Moe Nin.

In Burma today, however, Moe Nin is no unknown entity. Extensive parts of his oeuvre continue to be republished. That a kind of historical amnesia has overtaken Burmese society about his modern 'sex talk' suggests that his discourse on desire and intimacy has for long—if not always—inhabited the margins of literary and cultural orthodoxy. This situation may yet change. The *Hnyou* controversy of 2014, and the recent announcement by the Mandalay government that it will police the 'inappropriate behaviour' of gay men,[84] signal the Burmese state's and society's increasing preoccupation with the sexual, and expanding production of discourses about sex. Who knows what new light these developments may cast on *Perfection of desire* and Moe Nin's other works on intimate modernity?

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81 Maung Tin 1948.

82 Both were published by the same press (Yangon: Tin win poun hneik taik) in 1964.

83 At some point in the late 1960s or 1970s, the era of "Burmese Way to Socialism" and Cold War politics, the production of popular literature on sexual matters appears to have come to a halt.

84 Watson 2015.

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CHAPTER 8

Contested Modernities and Spectres of Progress in Twentieth-Century Siam/Thailand

Janit Feangfu and Rachel V. Harrison

I am a spectre brought forth by time to haunt the people of the old world with old ideas. Nothing can console you; nor can you stop the march of time that will bring forth yet more spectres.

• • •

Sai Sima in *Pisat* (*The spectre*), by Seni Saowaphong[1]

• • •

There must be many spectres, not just one.

• • •

Seni Saowaphong, speaking of *Pisat*[2]

• • •

Introduction

"Clearly, there are many possible solutions to the question of how one understands the predicament of the Thai modern", argues Dipesh Chakrabarty in his

1 Seni Saowaphong 1994:192, translated by and quoted in Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:459. All subsequent translations of quotations from the Thai texts in this chapter are taken from the translation into English of *Pisat*, under the title *Ghosts* by Marcel Barang (2009), Internet Edition and referenced as Seni Saowaphong 2009. However, because Barang translates the Thai term *pisat* as ghost(s) we have replaced this with the term spectre, in keeping with our preference for this rendition of the novel's title.

2 *Sonthana* 1985:27, quoted in Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:462.

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consideration of the "Names and repetitions of postcolonial history" in relation to semi-colonial Siam.[3] In this chapter we explore some of the multiplicities and ambiguities of modernity that pertain to Thailand at key historical and political junctures of the twentieth century. We do so with reference to a series of cultural texts, from literary translations and adaptations to political pamphlets and photographic portraits of both monarchs and commoners, tracing the trajectories of modernity, and its association with questions of space and social class. The chapter subsequently moves to an analysis of Seni Saowaphong's novel *Pisat* (*The spectre*), set largely in post-World War Two Bangkok.

In these discussions of Thai modernities we remain cognisant of potential likenesses to the evolution of modernity in other parts of Southeast Asia and beyond. For the failure to do so only serves to reiterate the unhelpful framework of exceptionalism so favoured by conservative, nationalist narratives of Thai historiography that maintain an entirely separate, culturally superior course of history for a Siam that never fell to Western colonial intervention. With notable exceptions such as historian Thongchai Winichakul's work,[4] mainstream approaches of the type located in Thai educational curricula as well as wider forms of accepted cultural wisdom steadfastly hold to the view that nineteenth-century Siam escaped colonization as a result of the erudite and skilful diplomacy of the auto-Westernizing Bangkok elite, most notably King Rama IV (Mongkut, r. 1851–1868) and V (Chulalongkorn, r. 1868–1910). A prime example of the way such narratives have been linked to upholding national pride is the construction of national history by the younger brother of King Rama V, Prince Damrong Rajanubhab (1862–1943). Granted the accolade, the 'Father of Thai history', Prince Damrong popularized and cemented the nationalist narrative of an unbroken lineage of Thai kingdoms from Sukhothai to Ayutthaya to Bangkok that remained steadfastly and valiantly independent of foreign rule. And within this geographical framework he defined the oft-invoked "national characteristics of the Thai people" as a "love of national independence, toleration and power of assimilation".[5]

Nevertheless, transitions from the colonial to the post-colonial and engagements with multiple forms of modernity are marked by ambivalences and hybridities in Siam/Thailand that differ in some senses from those of the formally and formerly colonized nations of Southeast Asia. At the same time, however,

3 Chakrabarty 2010:ix.

4 Thongchai Winichakul 1994, 2000.

5 These terms were first presented in his keynote address "The nature of government in Siam since antiquity" (*Laksana kan-pokkhrong prathet sayam tae boran*) made in 1927 (Damrong Rajanubhab 1928:9).

they also remain fundamentally *connected* to similar kinds of processes in numerous other ways. This connectedness is not restricted to comparisons within the relatively limited geographical realm of Southeast Asia, as Chakrabarty observes:

> Thai history provides an obvious, and almost text-book, study in contrast to South Asian history of the modern period. Thailand is another and proximate Asian country that has experienced the gravitational pull of Europe over all its questions and agitations to do with becoming 'modern'. Yet, unlike India, it was never formally colonized.[6]

Following this assertion, made in his foreword to Harrison and Jackson's edited collection on *The ambiguous allure of the West: Traces of the colonial in Thailand* (2010), Chakrabarty proceeds to further support the volume's sustained critique of Thai exceptionalism vis-à-vis the country's experience of the colonial encounter:

> [T]he fact that Thailand was never *formally* colonized did not ever stop the country from being constrained by Western imperial powers—mainly British and French—in ways reminiscent of what colonized nations suffered [...] [T]he very imagination of modernity and modern institutions in Thailand was over-determined by a certain cultural dominance of Europe. The figure of the *farang*, the European or white person [...] also haunted the politics of being modern in Thailand in the same way as it did in India. It was as though the *farang*, more than the Indian or the Burmese or the Malay or the Chinese or the Cambodian or the Lao, was *the* Other against whom the modern person in Thailand defined or measured himself or herself. The history of modern Thailand can thus also be seen as a chapter, distinctive but not exceptional in its historical specificity, in the history of European imperial domination of Asia.[7]

What is evident from the position Chakrabarty defines is that the trajectories of Thai modernity commence at the point of Siam's engagement with the colonial West (though this is not to suggest, of course, that modernization and Westernization are precisely one and the same). It is this sustained encounter with the self-proclaimed, post-industrial 'source' of modernity that

6 Chakrabarty 2010:vii.

7 Chakrabarty 2010:ix.

inculcates Siam into assuming a series of overlapping positions as a newly emerging nation-state: that is, as autonomous; as semi-colonial, crypto-colonial, auto-colonial; and as internally colonizing in relation to its own outlying territories furthest from the centre of elite power in Bangkok.[8] To clarify, in contrast to the mainstream narratives of Siam/Thailand as a steadfastly independent and fiercely self-determining nation-state, the term 'semi-colonial' was first introduced as a more nuanced definition of Siam/Thailand's relationship with Western colonialism by Thai Marxist thinkers in the late 1940s, such as Udom Srisuwan. The notion was further developed in the 1970s by the Political Economy group, led by Thai historian Chatthip Nartsupha. As Lysa Hong observes:

> These radical studies which seriously questioned the cornerstone of Thai history and national ideology: that Thailand remained independent amidst the tide of colonialism that swept Southeast Asia from the nineteenth century, focused on the mode of production and the economy as their thrust.[9]

The extent to which Siam/Thailand can be understood as semi-colonial, together with the limitations of this term, forms the central focus of Harrison and Jackson's edited volume on the traces of the colonial in Thailand, engaging with the contributions to this debate of Benedict Anderson, Tamara Loos, Maurizio Peleggi, and others.[10] It further explores Michael Herzfeld's preference for the term 'crypto-colonialism' with reference to Siam/Thailand via its comparison with Greece. And it reiterates the significance of Kasian Tejapira's critique of Siam/Thailand as 'auto-colonial', meaning namely that the ruling Bangkok elite modelled themselves in the image of the West in order to proclaim themselves 'civilized' in the eyes of the very powers they chose to imitate for the purpose of extending their influence at home.[11]

Taking this historical framework as our starting point, we proceed to plot key points in the trajectories of modernity in Siam/Thailand, and to subsequently identify the ways in which these both influenced and were expressed in cultural texts.

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8 See, for example, Hong 2004; Jackson 2004; Loos 2006; Thongchai Winichakul 1994.

9 Hong 2004:328.

10 Harrison and Jackson 2010; Anderson 1978; Loos 2006; Peleggi 2002.

11 Kasian Tejapira 2001.

Roots of Modernity, Relations to Coloniality

In Thai the term that describes something or someone as 'modern' is *than-samai*, [12] a compound word that means 'being in step with (*than*) the time or the era (*samai*)'. While *than-samai* conveys this capability, it further implies that the 'times' or 'era' always lies some way further ahead, that 'time' is set by the Other, and that it therefore requires constant effort simply to 'keep abreast' of a pace set by that Other. To be *than-samai* thus implies a perpetual state of attempting to be both 'in time' and *in* the times. Alternatively, the notion of 'the modern' is translated as *samai-mai* or 'new epoch', which defines the quality or characteristic of belonging 'in a new era'. The nuanced difference between these two terms is evident from the fact that someone may be labelled as a *samai-mai* person (in terms of outlook and attitude towards life) without being *than-samai* (in terms of self-presentation and life-style, for example).

Conservative, nationalist Thai historiography pays tribute to the insightful monarchs, Mongkut and Chulalongkorn for their almost single-handed introduction of modernity to Siam. They are widely referred to as 'the modernizing monarchs'. Accordingly, these rulers courted what they deemed to be the benefits of engagement with the 'modern'/Western world—the acquisition of new forms of scientific knowledge, technological advances, methods of administration, fashions and artefacts, as well as supposedly more 'civilized' social mores. They were credited with importing the discourse of modernity from abroad, as an alien yet beneficial tool. At the same time, however, they also rejected the more corrosive elements they considered to be at odds with an untouchable, purer cultural core—such as, for example, Christianity. As Thongchai Winichakul explains, a conceptual bifurcation between the spiritual and the material was maintained as a precisely honed strategy by which to "come to terms with the West".[13] The much-extolled prowess of Siam's modernizing elites in adroitly defending the nation against the threats of colonial aggrandizement posed by Britain and France is hence presented in Thai nationalist discourse as

12 There is no generally agreed system of representing written Thai in Roman script and all current systems have some limitations. In this paper we have adopted a modified version of the official Royal Thai General System of transcription (RTGS). The system makes no distinction between long and short vowel forms and tones are not represented. We differ slightly from the RTGS in using 'j' for the Thai 'jor jan', and not 'ch'. Dashes are used to separate units of compound expressions that are translated as a single term in English, such as *than-samai* or *samai-mai* for 'modern'. We follow the Thai norm of referring to Thai authors by given names, not surnames, and all citations by Thai authors are in alphabetical order in the bibliography and elsewhere, according to given names.

13 Thongchai Winichakul 2010:135.

the key reason for the country's sustained and proud independence from the late nineteenth century onwards.[14]

In the reign of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI, r. 1910–1925), however, the allure of Western modernity as the saviour of the fledgling Thai nation-state had begun to show signs of waning. As heir apparent, Vajiravudh was among the first generation of young Bangkok elites to be educated abroad in Europe. Schooling at Eton, followed by entry to Oxford and a short stint in the Durham Light Infantry, had instilled in him an evident admiration for Victorian Englishness that initially fostered a desire for selective imitation. Swayed by this cultural stimulus, Vajiravudh returned home from Europe to translate several works by Shakespeare into Thai (*The merchant of Venice, Romeo and Juliet* and *As you like it*), and to earn the accolade of the 'father of Thai detective fiction', thanks to an avid interest in re-scripting *The adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Renaming his Siamese detective Mr Thong-in, Vajiravudh expressed himself symbolically through the creation of a hero with a brilliant mind, asserting his authority through the powers of reason, rationality and intellect.

Soon after ascending the throne, however, Vajiravudh began to express serious reservations about the effects of too much Western influence on the development of a Thai national culture. Instead, he spearheaded a construction of Thainess that specifically incorporated the rejection of European inspiration. In essays he published as King, such as "The cult of imitation" (*Latthi ao yang*, 1915), he posed the question: "Is it not time for us to search out our own true freedom for our nation?"[15] Whereas Western modernity had held a certain allure in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as a vehicle by which to necessarily 'keep pace with the West'—and hence allay fears of the threats that the West might pose to Siamese sovereignty—modernity came to be acknowledged in the creation of the Thai nation-state as, to some degree, culturally and politically Other. The threat of too much modernity fostered anxieties among the Bangkok elite about how integration into the modern world might destroy what they envisaged as a 'core' national identity that pre-existed and had been shaped independently of the West. While dynamism and change mark the modern in Europe, emerging from a very specific set of industrial and economic factors, for Siam/Thailand the embrace of the modern was interlocked in complex ways with an anxiety over the ability—and indeed the desirability—to 'keep up' with the pace set by a foreign Other. This anxiety was addressed by a persistent restorative tendency to cast back into Siam's pre-(semi)colonial past in a search for forms of authority derived from indigenous heritage and

14 For a full discussion of this argument, see Harrison 2010.

15 Asvabahu 1994:46–7.

FIGURE 8.1 Crown Prince Vajiravudh, 1907.
THAILAND NATIONAL ARCHIVES, REF. 22M000070.

lineage that could be called upon by the ruling elite. As a result, forms of modernity in Siam are thoroughly hybrid in character; and the representations of this modernity that appear in early twentieth century Thai fiction are marked by that same hybridity, generating complex texts that comprise the conflicting discourses of the modern, the pre-modern, the traditional and the new.

This pattern was in fact already emergent even before Vajiravudh ascended the throne, as visualized in a well-known photograph, taken in 1907 (Figure 2). In it the Crown Prince poses as an erudite archaeologist-cum-detective, seated on a Western chair and smoking a pipe, as would his literary hero Sherlock Holmes. His adoration of the rational is alluded to in his use of a magnifying glass, through which he spies a relic discovered on a recent expedition to the early Siamese kingdom of Sukhothai (1238–1438). Here the heir to the throne examines and edifies the spectacular nature of the royal Siamese past through the adoption of modern technology, education and insight. His very attire

compounds the hybrid nature of this statement: sporting a panama hat, a safari jacket, stockings and court shoes, he completes the outfit with untailored silk trousers (*jongkraben*), tied between the legs in traditional Siamese style. While modern and Westernized in some key respects, the image also draws on the cachet of tradition and the significance of the past.

This particular construction of a hybrid form of modernity at the hands of the Siamese ruling class contrasts starkly with Bruno Latour's precise definition of the modern, despite his acknowledgement of it as a "proliferation of hybrids" in other key senses.[16]

> Modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists, yet all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time. When the word 'modern', 'modernisation', or 'modernity' appears, we are defining, by contrast, an archaic and stable past.

In semi-colonial Siam, on the other hand, 'modernity' made its appearance in conjunction with a resurgence, indeed a recreation, of an archaic past invented and imagined as more stable and unifying than it had been in truth. The "maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish" that Marshall Berman identifies as constituent of the experience of the modern, soon appeared threatening to the Bangkok status quo. Berman's observation that the associated anguish of modernity "engendered numerous nostalgic myths of pre-modern Paradise Lost" was nowhere more strongly felt than in early twentieth-century Bangkok.[17]

Paradise Lost: Malignant Modernities and the Spectre of the West

Having returned home to Siam, the ambiguity and anguish that Vajiravudh evidently began to feel in relation to the modern Western influence of his educational past manifested in a nostalgic counter-move towards the culturally strategic resurrection of the pre-modern. This is how we may read the photograph (Figure 8.1) of Vajiravudh as heir apparent, and how we may understand his subsequent writings as king, discussed above. The need for modernity as a tool by which to 'keep pace' with the West and by which the Bangkok elite

16 Latour 1993:10.

17 Berman 1983:15.

might exercise control over outlying territories at the periphery of the new nation-state had,[18] by the early twentieth century, to be countered by the alternative and perhaps more potent claim to power that came from the recourse to pre-modern tradition—invented or otherwise. Contrary to a commitment to the demolition of traditional structures that is central to Western modernity, Siamese modernity incorporated reinvigoration in ways that aspired to fortify rather than eradicate tradition. This was largely because the discourse of modernity was driven almost entirely by the traditional elite, inspired by and responding to its semi-colonial relations with the West.

The negative aspects of modernity were pitted against the positive associations with 'pure', rural Thainess in early twentieth-century fiction, exemplified by the first Thai novel, Khru Liam's *Khwam mai phayabat* (*No vendetta*), published in 1915 (under the pseudonym of Nai Samran).[19] As Thak Chaloemtiarana explains in his analysis of this text, "the allure of modernity was seen to compromise and change local social and ethical values",[20] and he defines *No vendetta* as "both a critique of modern Bangkok society and a didactic story about the pitfalls of modernity".[21] Thai women are, in Khru Liam's view, especially vulnerable to the decline in moral values and sexual decorum that modernity and its attendant urbanization bring to bear, as Thak identifies:

> The novel does not show much confidence in Thai women, for it questions their ability to cope with the new freedom that modernity provides, a modernity that pries women away from traditional social structures such as the family, their role as mothers and as wives and undermines traditional Thai culture and values. Women with their newfound liberty are in danger of losing themselves as Thai women. They can easily be corrupted by worldly and material temptations.[22]

For Thak, the point at which *No vendetta*'s female protagonist, Mae Prung, crosses the canal from the rural periphery to the Bangkok metropolis symbolizes her passage "from a pristine and traditional Thai life to the modern one represented by the city".[23] The image of the Thai countryside appears to shift around the time in which this novel was composed. Moving away from the connotation of barbarism that it acquired under the internally colonizing project

18 Harrison and Jackson 2010.
19 Khru Liam 2002.
20 Thak Chaloemtiarana 2009:461.
21 Thak Chaloemtiarana 2009:486.
22 Thak Chaloemtiarana 2009:484–5.
23 Thak Chaloemtiarana 2009:482.

of the Chulalongkorn years, the Thai countryside comes to be perceived by the second decade of the twentieth century as a pastoral paradise threatened by the ravages of (too much) modernity. For as Thongchai Winichakul indicates, in the late nineteenth century, the Bangkok elite had largely equated the rural with the culturally and morally base. They had explicitly followed Western colonial practice in constructing a series of inferior "Others within" from among their own subjects, labelling the *chao pa* (jungle or forest people) as the uncivilizable, and the *chao ban-nok* (the rural villagers) as backward and naïve.[24] It was only several decades later that this perception was to be, if not precisely reversed (it still persists in part to this day), then overlaid with a fantasy view of the Siamese rural as an unsullied paradise, free of the corrosive effects of Western modernity and symbolizing, therefore, the heart of the proudly independent Thai nation.

It is this complex interplay between Westernization, semi-colonialism, tradition, heritage, urbanization, civilization, nature and the rural that shape the trajectories of Thai modernity as they are revealed in the literary texts of the twentieth century.

Class, Modernity and Fiction

In their work on the experience of modernity in twentieth-century Western art, Harrison and Wood conclude that

> modernization is not, fundamentally, a technological fact, despite the visibility of machinery and architecture. It is a social fact, and is marked by the production of new social relations—relations between people, and more particularly between classes of people; not just relations between people and things.[25]

In Siam/Thailand, the question of the changing relationship between social classes of people, for which geographical space was also a metaphor, was to become a hallmark of the form of modernity that followed the death of Vajiravudh in 1925. Less than a decade later, the rising influence of French-educated middle-class commoners such as Pridi Panomyong and Plaek Pibunsongkhram led to the creation of the People's Party (*Khana Ratsadon*), the end of the absolute monarchy and the introduction of a constitutional one in

24 Thongchai Winichakul 2000:536.

25 Harrison and Wood 1992:127.

FIGURE 8.2 Siburapha and *Khana Suphapburut,* Bangkok, 1930. THAILAND NATIONAL ARCHIVES, REF. ก.สป.31/2.

its stead. The social and political changes that resulted in this 'Revolution' of June 1932 were both prefigured and reflected in contemporary literary trends. In 1929 a group of commoner writers, helmed by Kulap Saipradit (pseudonym Siburapha), came together under the collective name of *Khana Suphapburut*, or 'The Gentlemen'. Chusak Pattarakulvanit points to the choice of name as apposite in terms of its allusion not to elite gentlefolk (*phu di*) but, on the contrary, to polite (*suphap*) and responsible, male (*burut*) behaviour as elements of the new, modern values of the rising bourgeoisie.[26]

In his discussion of the well-known photograph of *Khana Suphapburut* (Figure 8.2), taken in 1930, Chusak defines precisely why and how class mattered at this significant cultural and political juncture. Dressed in an official uniform that they adopted as their own, their attire surprisingly resembles that of the quasi-modernizing Crown Prince Vajiravudh seen in Figure 8.1. It comprised a *rajapataen* (deriving from the words *raj pattern*) jacket with a stand-up collar and five front buttons, with untailored soft satin Thai trousers, white knee socks and black court shoes. Chusak explains how the outfit was adapted

26 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2002:79.

from that used in the Siamese court from the era of King Chulalongkorn as a signifier of being 'civilized' (*siwilai*). By the late 1920s, however, it was no longer limited to the aristocracy and had, in yet another typically hybrid move, been assumed by the burgeoning middle classes. As Chusak clarifies, therefore, the outfit constitutes "a mixture between aristocracy, wealth and modernity".[27] What is noteworthy here is that this forward-looking, bourgeois literary collective's claim to modernity is, much like in the photograph of Crown Prince Vajiravudh, marked by a close collusion with times past. Beyond this, however, the photograph illustrates, in Chusak's view, a visual claim to professionalism, as the career of writer moved from one requiring the patronage of the upper classes, to one that could be financially sustained by the economics of the marketplace. Siburapha's choice of location—on the steps of the Ministry of Justice—further indicates a new flattening of the social structure, one in which all citizens are equal before the law: as Chusak reminds us, the location is only a stone's throw away from the grounds of the Grand Palace itself.[28]

It is this new construction of Siamese modernity, blown in on the winds of social change that marked the demise of the absolute monarchy in Siam, which reverberate throughout the pages of Seni Saowaphong's *The spectre*, a novel defined by Herbert Phillips as a sensitive portrayal "of how the 1932 revolution completely altered the interpersonal relationships between social classes".[29]

The Spectre that Time has Fashioned: Changing Readerships and Changing Modernities

Described by Chusak Pattarakulvanit as 'one of very few novels of the 'art-for-life' school that embraces the wonders of modernity and its liberating power against old beliefs and values',[30] Seni Saowaphong's *The spectre* first appeared in serialized form between 1953 and 1954 in the weekly magazine *Sayam Samai*. The story is one of a love nurtured across the class divide, between Rachani, the youngest daughter of an urban aristocrat family, and Sai Sima, the youngest son of a peasant family and the first in his village to attend university in Bangkok. Having befriended each other at a party, Rachani's relationship with Sai becomes a source of serious concern to her family, especially when

27 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2002:78.
28 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2002:88.
29 Phillips 1987:29.
30 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:466.

they realize that she prefers Sai's company to that of a man they view as her social equal. Rachani's father, referred to as His Lordship in the novel, lays an elaborate plan to publicly expose Sai as an imposter at a dinner party for their upper-class peers. Tension mounts over the dinner table when Sai responds to His Lordship's contempt with a spectacular declaration of class war:

> I am a spectre brought forth by time to haunt those people of the olden world with old ideas. […] You think you can destroy this spectre but you will never ever.[31]

Sai then leaves and Rachani, stunned and ashamed of her father's behaviour, departs the family home for good later that night. She visits Sai to speak her heart before bidding him farewell in the golden morning light.

Although many may now regard *The spectre* as one of the Thai novels "that best depicts the class conflict between the old and the new in the time of the deep social and economic changes brought about by modernization", it was in fact little-known at the time of its initial publication.[32] This remained the case even after the novel was marketed as a complete volume in 1957. The censorious effects of the 1958 coup d'état, executed by military hard-man Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat, led the publisher to remove it entirely from the market and it did not resurface until several years after Sarit's death in 1963. In the years following the initial appearance of *The spectre,* an underlying sense of 'lack' and 'belatedness' continued to drive Thailand's search for 'modernity' and its aspirations to 'being modern'. The tangible effects of this on the lived experience of Thai people were felt under the developmental discourses led by the military regimes of Sarit and his successors, Field Marshal Thanom Kittikhajon and Field Marshal Praphat Jarusathian. Throughout this long spell of US-backed, Cold War military regimes and army-style modernization, Thailand underwent multiple, complex transformations in the name of development (*kan-phatthana*) and modernization (*khwam-thansamai*). Among them were the explosive growth of the tourist industry; the expansion of education as a result of the economic boom brought forth by the country's 'progress' along American, anti-communist strategic lines; and a substantial increase in the number of young Thais educated in the US. The cumulative effect was that, by the latter half of the 1960s, a gradual revival of radical Thai intellectual thought, hitherto supressed under Sarit, took root amongst an increasingly vociferous youth movement, inspired in part by the

31 Seni Saowaphong 1994:192, translated and quoted in Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:459.

32 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:466–7.

international zeitgeist of 1968.[33] The dissident voices that spoke out against US imperialism in Thailand also grew from the context of anti-Vietnam War activism, spearheaded by Thai intellectuals and students who criticized, and posed a challenge to, the military junta with their anti-American nationalist and anti-war discourses. Their protests culminated in a student-led mass democratic revolution that forced Thanom and Praphat into exile in October 1973, bringing an (albeit temporary) end to a long era of military dictatorship. In its stead came a short interval of relatively open parliamentary democracy, and the vocal expression of social and political consciousness by a radicalized younger generation.

As such, Seni Saowaphong's *The spectre* exemplifies a body of socially committed Thai literary works that reached the pinnacle of their popularity not at the time of their original publication, but among a readership of pro-democracy student activists and radical thinkers of the 1970s. It was only upon the rediscovery of the novel in 1970, when the student radical poet Witthayakorn Chiangkun wrote a critical review of the text, that it attained 'handbook' status for a burgeoning movement committed to the fight for greater social equality in Thailand.[34] This was the Cold War generation, many of whom had migrated to the capital from Thailand's rural heartlands to benefit from the 'American Era' expansion of tertiary education. And it was the generation that saw its own experience reflected in that of the *The spectre*'s key protagonist, Sai Sima.

Raising the Spectre, Changing the Order of Things

The socially committed themes of *The spectre* are embodied in Sai Sima, a local-boy-made-good who hails from farming stock but becomes a lawyer

33 Anderson and Mendiones 1985:20–3; Prajak Kongkirati 2005.

34 *The spectre* was also included in Witthayakorn's *100 Good books that Thai people should read: A guide,* published in 1999 and the result of the Selection and Recommendation of Good Books that Thai People Should Read Research Project, funded by Thailand Research Fund (TRF) in 1996. The project comprised a team of ten researchers, all well known academics, journalists and writers, some of whom had themselves fled Bangkok in the aftermath of the 1976 coup and who had returned to mainstream society only in the early 1980s. The books selected by the committee were published between 1865 to 1976 and are considered, as a result of the selection, to have acquired the status of a 'modern Thai classic'. In terms of their collective intellectual tradition, the 100 books in question demonstrated two conflicting lines of thought that persisted in Thai society: on the one hand, that of the willingness to adapt on the part of the ruling classes; and on the other, the preference for revolutionary and progressive ideas on the part of the intellectuals (Witthayakorn Chiangkun 1999:14, 31, 44–5).

in a respectable firm and a legal consultant at a bank in Bangkok. The name of this 'modern' Thai hero Sai in fact translates as 'belatedness', an indication, perhaps, that in Seni's radical view the modern values Sai personifies arrived in Thailand in all too tardy a fashion.[35]

Most critics agree that the ghost(s) or spectre(s) (the Thai term *pisat* may be translated into English as either) of the novel's title refer to three junctures in the narrative. First, during the Japanese occupation in World War Two of Sai's home district of Bang Bo in Samut Prakan province, southeast of Bangkok, villagers who have sabotaged Japanese rice boats are described by the Japanese first lieutenant in his report as "a small number of thieving *ghosts* of no significance at all".[36] Following his statement, the novel's narrator intervenes:

> Thieving ghosts? The first lieutenant did not report the fact that these ghosts did not take away a single grain of rice. They sank it in the water. The behaviour of these ghosts scared the living daylights out of them all. It must be the ghosts of the guardian spirits protecting the area who would not allow uninvited guests to stay.[37]

Secondly, Sai himself is referred to as "an ungrateful spectre" by Maha Juan, a former monk who had taught him as a boy, when he first moved from Bang Bo to Bangkok. Maha Juan later leaves the monkhood and marries a wealthy landowner from Bang Bo, whereupon he asks Sai to help him bring a lawsuit against the local farmers who owe money to his wife. The request puts Sai in the uncomfortable position of having to make a choice between his own debt of gratitude to his teacher, as prescribed by Thai Theravada tradition, or betraying his rural roots and his loyalty to his own kind:

> Sai was silent for a while. "I am sorry, sir. I don't think I can take on the cases for you".
> Maha Juan stared at his former disciple in utter amazement. He had never thought he'd hear such a sentence from him.

35 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:469. Chusak's own interpretation of the relevance of Sai's name refers to the character as a timely predecessor of the ambiguities of the October generation of student activists. His arguments are convincingly put forward with inimitable insight in *The spectre of modernity and the modern spectre*.

36 Seni Saowaphong 2009:147.

37 Seni Saowaphong 2009:147.

> "I feel that if I did, it would be like suing my own relatives, my own parents", Sai went on in a normal tone of voice. "True, these people aren't my real parents or relatives, but they've been clearing the jungle since the days of my father. I bathed in the same canal as they do, ate the rice that grew in the same land, made offerings at the same temple. The things I've grown up on in body and soul are the same things their bodies and their souls have grown up on. I owe you much, Master. I do not deny this, and I still feel it always. If I had the possibility to repay my debt to you, I wouldn't hesitate, but we must know how to draw the line between the personal and the collective".[38]

In articulating his position so clearly, Sai swears a two-pronged allegiance to a post-1932 modernity that combines questions of both social class and space. He deliberately moves against the mores of hierarchy and cultural obligation—the feudal (*sakdina*) order of the old world—in support of a rural underclass that he identifies with as his own kith and kin. Sai's gesture is an entirely modern one, a spectral threat to traditional sources and sites of power and to the status quo.

It is in this context that Chusak Pattarakulvanit's observation regarding the connection between *The spectre* and Marx and Engels' *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* pertains. Not simply because the novel's title is drawn from *The Manifesto's* opening sentence—"A spectre is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism"—but rather because both texts refer more widely to "social change and transformation at an exponential speed, brought about by the rise of capitalism".[39] Most pertinent here to Sai's refusal to conform to the request of Maha Juan is Marx and Engels' observation that:

> All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.[40]

And, as Chusak goes on to conclude in reference to this parallel,

> the new world and the new generation Sai repeatedly refers to in *The spectre* are, in fact, emblematic of a fast-changing world of modernity

38 Seni Saowaphong 2009:155.
39 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:463.
40 Marx and Engels 2008:38, quoted in Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:463–4.

> and a rising generation of bourgeoisie, as described in *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*.[41]

The third occasion in which the term of the 'spectre' assumes significance derives from one of the central elements of the novel's plot—Sai's love for Rachani, whom he meets while working in Bangkok. The social mismatch between the two protagonists that causes Rachani's father such dismay is expressed in his rejection of Sai in the scornful ejaculation: "This confounded spectre prevents me from sleeping. I do not like to see his face at all".[42] The novel reaches its infamous climax at the dinner party His Lordship has organized in order to publicly humiliate Sai and intimidate him into breaking off the relationship with Rachani (nicknamed Lek). Addressing the assembled guests over the dinner table, His Lordship describes the agony he feels at seeing his daughter courting the company of a social inferior such as Sai:

> "They say this is the age of freedom, that these days anyone can do whatever they please without regard for tradition or proper behaviour, and that nobodies popping right out of the jungle can become powerful people. I hold that this kind of thinking degrades people instead of improving them, makes them forget their place, forget the order of the land. […] People like this do not look at themselves as others would see them. They hanker after status without realising that nobility comes from the blood. Crows must be crows and swans will always be swans". His Lordship marked another brief pause. "Let them have their freedom wherever they please but it will not be in my house. Our Lek is the daughter of a *jaokhun* [noble lord] not some strumpet on the pavement, and those who are trying to raise themselves by their bootstraps and pass themselves off as gentlemen should give up any hope that this would ever be so. The door of this house is always open, but to some people only".[43]

His Lordship's plot backfires, however, instead providing Sai the occasion to retaliate by speaking his mind on the subject of the diminishing significance of the elite in the modern world:

> I'm extremely proud today that I was born the son of a farmer. I don't know why my father was not an aristocrat, but there are many more farmers

41 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:464.
42 Seni Saowaphong 2009:251.
43 Seni Saowaphong 2009:298–9.

> than aristocrats, and my father belongs to the majority. I therefore have no reason to feel ashamed that I didn't happen to be born in some aristocratic family of ancient lineage, because aristocracy is a condition that we ourselves created and chose to uphold. That situation won't last, as time, which never stands still, will change it irresistibly.
>
> Indeed, differences in eras and times give us conflicting views. I'm not an intruder on those of you who live in lofty ivory towers, but when you spit your mucus to the ground from your towers, I have to wipe it off because it's something filthy. There's no need to harm you, however, because no matter what, you must disappear in time. You won't be able to resist the changes brought about by time.
>
> You misunderstand if you think I'm trying to pass myself off as an aristocrat, because that would be going backwards. Much time has elapsed already, and your world and mine are getting further apart. *I'm the ghost that time has fashioned to scare those who live in the old world, to give nightmares to those who hold to the old ways of thinking, and nothing can comfort you, just as nothing can stop the march of time, which will produce more and more ghosts like me*. You thought you could destroy this particular ghost tonight amid such exalted company, but there's no way this can happen, because this ghost is even more invulnerable than Achilles or Siegfried as he is protected by the shield of time. You may hold on to a few scraps for a while but you won't be able to control everything forever. We're worlds apart. Mine is the world of ordinary people.[44]

Having uttered these words, Sai takes up the invitation extended by his host to depart the premises. Incensed by her father's actions, Rachani renounces her own class background, and moves to the countryside to become a schoolteacher—in her words, "To start a new life and to enter a new world".[45] As Rachani and Sai bid each other farewell in the golden light of the Bangkok dawn, the closing lines of the novel connote hope for the future and an ongoing commitment to the resolution of difficult social ills.

For Sai, and later Rachani, a choice must be made in *The spectre,* between maintaining the old way of thinking and embracing the new possibilities and

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44 Seni Saowaphong 2009:300–2. Contrast the wording of the italicized section of this quotation from Barang's translation of the novel, with the alternative translation by Chusak, quoted at the opening of this chapter: *I am a spectre brought forth by time to haunt the people of the old world with old ideas. Nothing can console you; nor can you stop the march of time that will bring forth yet more spectres.*

45 Seni Saowaphong 2009:305.

ideas that come with the modern world, their aim being to create a society that is both equal and fair. As Sai himself puts it:

> "We belong to a new generation which looks at the world and everything with candour. We look at everything that has been critically and rationally. I think that with the question 'Why?' with a single word, we can turn the whole world and everything in it upside down and examine the reasons for it".[46]

No other passage in *The spectre* better expresses how the character of Sai Sima defines himself and his generation as a modern subject. The formation of new social ideas in conjunction with a class of educated common people from diverse backgrounds who are gathering momentum and becoming an agent of social change threaten the old elite and their existing power structures.

A further pair of characters that bolster the novel's socially engaged themes of education, social mobility and class difference is that of Kingthian and Nikhom, whose lives form a sub-plot that reflects the inter-class romance of Rachani and Sai. Kingthian, a close friend of Rachani from university, comes from a humble background. After her father, a lowly civil servant, has passed away, Kingthian's mother works hard to earn enough money for Kingthian to complete her higher education. Kingthian initially takes a teaching job in a government school in Bangkok, but later decides to devote herself to supporting children in the Thai countryside where Nikhom works. Nikhom, like Sai, comes from a rural farming background and has graduated from university with a degree in political science. As a result he takes up a post as an assistant district officer in a remote province in Thailand's northeast (*Isan*), where he dedicates his career to bettering the lives of the have-nots. This portrayal of Kingthian and Nikhom later became a prototype for the socially committed couple of humble background in the 1970s' Art For Life (*sinlapa pheua chiwit*) genre of literature that inspired the young activists. Their characters are true to Sai's declaration that the march of time will "bring forth more and more spectres".[47]

Not only social mobility but also spatial mobility is crucial to reading the question of modernity in *The spectre*. The difference between urban and rural life in *The spectre* is central for both the male and female protagonists in their roles as the new generation of agents for social change. While the city is presented as a privileged site that brims with the opportunities

46 Seni Saowaphong 2009:253.

47 Seni Saowaphong 1994:192, translated and quoted in Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:459.

of the modern world, the countryside is penetrated by capitalism in the form of money-lending and land-grabbing (in addition to being plagued by the hierarchies of the bureaucracy). This parallel casts into sharp relief the contrasting forces of modernity, visible, on the one hand, as possibilities gained through the provision of education; and on the other hand as perils threatened by the encroaching alien forces of capitalism. And it is this unequal development between the city and the countryside that results, at the conclusion of the novel, in each of the principal characters abandoning Bangkok as a home of the traditional elite.

The depiction of conflict in *The spectre* between the old world of the ruling elite and the new world of commoners, or 'spectres', delivered a germinal message to its readers, resonating in particular for the Leftist radicals and activists of the 1970s that came to admire the novel so keenly. *The spectre* taught that educated commoners such as Sai who had developed a sense of class consciousness must dedicate themselves and their knowledge to the service of the exploited.[48] It is in this sense that the novel presents a view of how modernity benefits men and women alike through education and, as a result, enables them to break loose from the entrenched patron-client system.

Equally important in the text, however, are the questions of urban life and the expansion of the urban middle class. In this regard *The spectre* is among the first Thai novels to portray modernity and the speed at which it propels the city and the people forward. Its key protagonists experience the inequalities of modernization and take it upon themselves to strive to correct this. In Chusak's assessment of the novel this is, however, less than positive:

> The ambiguous ending of *The spectre* suggests that, although modernity liberates individuals from a patronage system and a structure of oppression, it can be instrumental in another form of social oppression.[49]

Nevertheless, it is new encounters with the hustle and bustle of city life that shape the aspirations, experiences and actions of its protagonists to an unprecedented degree, although the novel portrays changes to the lives of its female characters more intimately than it does their male counterparts. Such changes range from the materiality of everyday experience to the new opportunities, choices and attitudes on offer. Rachani's options, for example, contrast markedly with the more limited horizons of her mother and her sisters. Rachani's mother nostalgically recalls, with a keen sense of loss, "powder and turmeric",

48 Barang 2009:310.

49 Chusak Pattarakulvanit 2015:467.

a belt of splendid gold, "silk robes and chintzes and loose bodices and simple cloth wrapped around the waist" that were replaced by the foreign-sounding names of "creams and lipsticks and hair lotions", leather belts of different colours, shirts, skirts and trousers.[50] Rachani's two older sisters have limited horizons, having only a secondary school education, as a result of which they

> stayed at their grandmother's beck and call for years on end doing nothing but waiting until a bride's settlement had been made, at which point they passed from her custody to someone else's.[51]

Later, Rachani's sister Daruni, who suffers as a result of her husband's infidelity, tells Rachani:

> I'm very unlucky not to have learned anything much, unlike you. […] You have knowledge, and you mustn't kowtow to anyone. Find yourself a job and stand on your own, and don't think of getting married right away.[52]

Here, the luxury of not having to work has turned sour for the female members of the elite. By contrast, and against her parents' wishes, Rachani takes a job in the foreign relations division of a bank where she is responsible for all English correspondence. Her expectation is that

> work would make her independent and allow her to know more people and broaden her understanding of the world, which was a necessity in today's fast-changing world.[53]

Rachani's awareness that income means independence and freedom from the old world interpolates her into a capitalist mode of production, symbolized by the bank where she is employed.

The changes experienced by the female members of Rachani's elite family are, of course, by no means representative of other women's. However, at least in Rachani's age group the female characters of Kingthian and Nitthaya also find education the key to social mobility and to bettering their lives. In the case of Kingthian, she obtains a secure and respectable job as a schoolteacher, fulfilling the advice of her mother to "[s]eek knowledge for yourself so you won't have a life of hardship

50 Seni Saowaphong 2009:5–6.
51 Seni Saowaphong 2009:6.
52 Seni Saowaphong 2009:52.
53 Seni Saowaphong 2009:56–7.

like me".[54] The minor character of Nitthaya, the daughter of 'Old Phoon the driver' who has been with Rachani's family since he was a child, similarly supports this message. Nitthaya, who has completed secondary education and teaches in a private school, exemplifies independence achieved through education as a modern form of the power to emancipate, an opportunity unattainable by her father. In his old age, Phoon bemoans his fate to Rachani:

> I've got a place to sleep, enough to eat, and that's all. His Lordship thinks his benevolence is sufficient. I'm not being ungrateful …, but life these days isn't at all what it was before, forty, fifty years ago. I'm old now, with nowhere else to go, but as for my child, Nit, I won't let her be a slave's daughter. Enough's enough.[55]

Both Kingthian's mother and Nithaya's father are fully aware of the need to break this vicious cycle that has held their own generation back, ensnaring them in a patron-client system that has depleted their own ability to stand independently, on their own two feet. It is these experiences that therefore shape their attitude towards the necessary education, and subsequent liberation, of their children. And it is themes such as these that resonated so clearly with the 'children' of the revolution that became the primary readership of *The spectre* in their own quest for liberation in 1970s Siam, the true spectres brought forth by time.

Contested and Contesting Modernities

It is clear from the literary texts and cultural materials that we have examined in this essay, that modernity (*khwam than-samai*) in Siam/Thailand comprises multiple features and makes departures in multiple, and often competing, directions. Having been introduced as a 'foreign' concept by the ruling Bangkok elite in the latter half of the nineteenth century, modernity initially built upon the influences of the West. It functioned as a project of power through which a claim to 'civilization' and 'progress' could be laid for the burgeoning nation state. Within this project, however, lay an essential bifurcation: on the one hand, the material world of science and reason was subject to the processes of modernization; while on the other hand, the spiritual realm remained necessarily rooted in tradition. Siamese modernity emerged alongside a resurgence

54 Seni Saowaphong 2009:15.
55 Seni Saowaphong 2009:64.

of tradition at the very point at which the former was considered alien and threatening to the forces that had derived power from its initial cachet. As the threat of the West dimmed in military and economic terms, and grew apparently more domineering in a social and cultural sense, the Siamese nation-builders of the early twentieth century revived local histories to balance the potentially corrupting forces of the modern, international world. Contemporary cultural texts—such as early novels and short stories—pointed to the pitfalls of modernity, while visual imagery shaped new perceptions of the significance of local, 'classical' traditions. Intrinsic to this process was the evolution of modernity in Siam/Thailand as a hybrid, unsettled and ambiguous cultural force.

At the heart of this conflicting perception of modernity lay the urban space of the city, with Bangkok as Siam's centre of spiritual and cultural power. And, as a detailed study of Seni Saowaphong's *The spectre* exemplifies, the connotations of space are never far from those of social class. With the rise in importance of the urban middle classes the discourse of modernity was wrested from the confines of the Bangkok elite and diffused more widely following the move to constitutional monarchy in 1932. The degree to which the bourgeoisie could define and lay claim to modernity remained limited, however, by the interventions of competing forces, most notably the military, who consolidated their power in the aftermath of World War Two. Most significantly, US influence in the region throughout the Cold War rendered the fields of 'progress' and 'development' (*kan-phatthana*) the preserve of military rule. As an effect of these competing claims to steer the project of modernity in Thailand, the characteristics of Thai modernity are inextricably contested, and always relational to external stimuli. When the military dictators Thanom and Praphat were finally ousted in October 1973 under pressure from the Leftist activists and intellectuals of the student movement that was itself born of the 'American Era', Thai modernity was a source of both allure and anxiety. Its allure derived from its positive strength to draw into question the stultifying traditions of inter-class relations, albeit compromised by the alienating effects of modern 'development' on Thailand's rural heartlands, from where many of the student radicals originally hailed. As an inspiration to this generation, Seni's protagonist Sai Sima embodies something of the fractured relationship that pertained not only between the upper and the middle classes but between the city and the countryside in Siam. In Sai Sima's experience, as *The spectre* shows, modernity provides both opportunity and threat: the opportunity of greater social mobility through education; coupled with the threat of rural demise through the corrosive effects of capitalism. The longing for the imagined 'purity' of the past is juxtaposed with the potential excitements of a modern future. This complex, hybrid picture remains as relevant to the texture of modernity today as it did at any other moment in twentieth-century Siam/Thailand.

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CHAPTER 9

Modernity and the Body

Franco-Vietnamese Children in the Colonial Era and Beyond

Christina Firpo

In 1943, French priests Dupont and Petit, the directors of the René Robin Orphanage for *métis* (mixed-race Franco-Vietnamese) boys in Hanoi, uncovered a "great crisis of immorality rampant among Eurasian boys and adolescents". The priests found "polluting stains" on the wards' sheets—even those belonging to prepubescent wards—and evidence of notes about plans for late-night *rendez-vous* to experiment in "indecent affections". The priests launched an investigation and called in a French doctor, André Quenardel. The doctor interrogated the children and extracted confessions from them. He found that they frequently masturbated and that some of them had "practiced homosexuality or tried it, more or less".[1]

Although French law considered homosexual acts by those under 25 years old as crimes punishable by prison time, Dr Quenardel arrived at a different solution. The doctor suggested separating the pubescent adolescents from the prepubescent boys so as to protect the younger boys from the "unhealthy manoeuvres" of the older boys. As for the pubescent adolescents, they would be "strictly watched over" throughout the night. Dr Quenardel prescribed a regimen of rigorous exercise to tire the boys out and induce a deep slumber, as well as a strict diet of low-salt food and no spices. Night-time meals were to be strictly vegetarian. Dr Quenardel ended his report to the Mayor of Hanoi and Orphanage Director Father Dupont by "underscoring the gravity of this moral disease which attacks the orphanage" and reassuring them that he would provide a "vigorous remedy".[2] The doctor ordered that any further "attacks on the moral code" be met with "merciless" expulsion.

Because the young orphan boys at the center of this investigation were of particular interest to the colonial government, the orphanage directors reported the incident to the Mayor of Hanoi, in whose archives this file was found. This incident at the René Robin Orphanage is a window into the history of

1 "Report", illegible signature, 11-03-1943, in: Vietnam National Archives, Centre 1, Hanoi (hereafter VNNA 1), Files of the Mayor of Hanoi (hereafter MH) 5900.

2 "Report", illegible signature, 11-03-1943, in: VNNA 1, MH 5900.

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body culture, as well as a modernity project for mixed-race children in colonial Indochina that was designed to solve colonial problems, including French depopulation and political threats.

At the heart of this modernity project in Indochina was a desire to manage Frenchmen—and potential Frenchmen, like the métis boys involved in this scandal—for French efforts to develop the nation state. As Eugen Weber has shown, in the late nineteenth century, while France embarked on a 'mission to civilize' distant people of the world under the French empire, the government used similar tactics to assimilate different localized French cultures into a homogenous Paris-oriented 'French' culture. The Parisian-based government thus turned the diverse people of the nation into *French*-men.[3] In Indochina, colonial administrators similarly attempted to transform métis children into Frenchmen. Their method of making Frenchmen of métis drew from another late nineteenth-century French modernist social reform movement, which reasoned that individuals could not be reformed while remaining in the environment in which their behaviour was 'formed and normed'. Instead, a change in physical and cultural environment would influence the individual's actions.[4] Colonial administrators in Indochina designed a programme to refashion the ambiguous identities of mixed-race, prepubescent children into ideal French citizens by changing the physical and cultural environment in which they were raised, and modifying their behaviour. The boys at the René Robin Orphanage were among more than 4000 métis children who were removed from their Vietnamese families, raised in French-run orphanages, and educated at French colonial schools to become upstanding French colonists. This project lasted through decolonization and into the post-colonial period.

In 1940s colonial Vietnam, French officials considered the children at the René Robin Orphanage to be teetering on the edges of three dangerous—and inherently ambiguous—identities. The first of these was racial. Owing to the peculiarities of colonial law and the social understanding of race at that time, there was no legal classification for métis.[5] As mixed-race Franco-Vietnamese, Ann Stoler has noted, the children occupied a racial no-man's land and hence had the potential to become either upstanding French citizens or disaffected colonial subjects who, colonial administrators feared, would harbour a Freudian resentment of their colonial fathers and the colonial state.[6] The second

3 Weber 1976.
4 Rabinow 1989:11.
5 Saada 2012.
6 Stoler 1989.

ambiguous identity was age related. As 10 to 14 year-olds, these children were at the cusp of adolescence, a pivotal and potentially troublesome time in life. French administrators believed children's morality to be malleable until they reached adolescence, at which point their characters would be irrevocably formed. Therefore, in the absence of a moral environment and a proper upbringing, the colony's fatherless métis could potentially become corrupt adults. The third ambiguous identity was sexual in nature. The boys at the René Robin Orphanage were experimenting with masturbation and homosexuality, which was considered deviant in French culture. If not 'cured' quickly, the young wards would presumably become homosexuals. The prescription for keeping these boys on track was to manage their bodies: specifically, to control the physical, cultural, and linguistic environment in which they were raised; to segregate them by age; and to restrict their diet and encourage exercise. With such interventions, Dr Quenardel and the administrators of the René Robin Orphanage believed that the mixed-race boys who were committing the alleged moral infractions could be turned into upstanding members of the colony's white French elite. Similar ideas would persist through the post-colonial period.

This chapter investigates the crisis and 'cure' for the boys at the René Robin Orphanage within the colonial project to raise them as modern French citizens. Both the scandal and solution focused on the boys' bodies. While the relationship between gender, bodies, and notions of modernity is well documented in the historiography of colonial Vietnam, these works focus on the role of women's bodies in the construction of Vietnamese tradition and modernity.[7] This chapter on métis boys sheds light on constructions of modernity and the masculine body, where such studies are currently lacking. I explore the historical context in which the scandal occurred and shaped the nature of the 'cure'. I show how both crisis and cure arose out of the subjects' identity as mutable beings living on the edge of colonial categories. As métis, they straddled the line between white and Asian; as adolescents, they were not quite boys but not yet men; and their experiments with sexuality placed them in an ambiguous terrain between heterosexual and homosexual. These complicated conditions notwithstanding, the doctor claimed he could save them by controlling their bodies. This 'crisis' of, and 'cure' for, masturbation and homosexual activity at the René Robin Orphanage tells us a great deal about the intersections of race, age, sexuality, bodies, as well as the project to form modern French citizens out of métis children in the colonial and post-colonial period.

7 Nguyen 2012; Zinoman 2013; Tran 2012.

The Crisis

Fathers Dupont and Petit considered the incident at the René Robin Orphanage serious enough to launch an investigation, call in Dr Quenardel to inspect the boys, and file a report to the Mayor of Hanoi. Yet, Dr Quenardel's solution was relatively progressive for the time period. Key to understanding how he dealt with the "moral disease" that "attacked"[8] the René Robin Orphanage is the ways in which French authorities understood hybrid racial identities, age, and sexuality in the late colonial period.

Race

The Eurasian métis boys at the center of the scandal at the orphanage were the racially ambiguous product of sexual relationships between Vietnamese mothers and French—or other European—fathers; as such, they were outcasts from French colonial society. Under the French Empire's juridical system, 'métis' did not exist in legal terms, as the legal system only had stipulated two classifications: French citizens or colonial subjects/protégés.[9] Métis whose parents were married or whose French father legally recognized paternity over his child were French citizens. Those métis, including the boys at the René Robin Orphanage, whose fathers failed—or refused—to recognize them remained indigenous subjects and were thus denied the rights and privileges of French citizens.

French civilians and colonial administrators feared that these métis children, who had been denied the privileges of French citizenship and raised in the Vietnamese cultural milieu, would grow up to resent their place in colonial society, identify with their Vietnamese compatriots, and eventually rebel against the colonial government. In the 1890s, wealthy French civilians had worked with colonial administrators to form welfare societies to 'protect' métis children who had been abandoned by their French fathers and left to live with their Vietnamese mothers. These Societies for the Protection of Métis Children, as they were called, founded the modernity project to raise métis children in a French cultural and linguistic milieu and paved the way for them to obtain French citizenship, by providing a French education—a requirement for citizenship—and offering legal counsel to argue their cases to the courts. The René Robin Orphanage was one such institution. Similar institutions for

8 "Report", illegible signature, 11-03-1943, in: VNNA 1, MH 5900.

9 Saada 2012.

mixed-race children existed all over the colonized world, including in the French West African colonies, French Martinique, Australia, India, and the Netherlands Indies.[10]

Although much of the public rhetoric about the protection societies and their modernity project was couched in humanitarian concerns about abandoned children and equal rights for all children of Frenchmen, private documents from the societies reveal a different story. Rather than concerning themselves with the children's fundamental well-being, the protection societies were worried about the long-term implications of their being raised in an indigenous cultural environment. Their fears were threefold. First, protection society authorities feared that white-looking children would grow up to identify with indigenous culture. Second, correspondence between protection societies and colonial officials revealed a concern that girls would follow their supposedly debauched Vietnamese mothers into prostitution, as authorities believed unmarried mothers were prostitutes.[11] And finally, one of the authorities' greatest concerns was that the boys would eventually rebel against the colonial government.[12] Protection societies operated on the belief that if they removed métis children from the Vietnamese cultural context and raised them in tightly-controlled French environments like the René Robin Orphanage, the children could be redeemed.

Many of their métis wards were not actually abandoned; rather, they had been living with their indigenous mothers before being removed and taken to the protection society 'orphanages'. Protection society officials in Indochina offered mothers incentives to give up their children, claiming that the orphanages would give the children a better life. In cases where mothers refused, the officials removed their children by force, invoking an 1889 metropolitan French law on the moral abandonment of children.[13]

Although the protection societies had initially been established largely to deter the threat of a métis rebellion, by the 1943 incident at the René

10 White 1999; Saada 2012; Mizutani 2011; Taylor 1983.

11 Gravelle 1913.

12 "Note sur la Société d'assistance aux enfants franco-indochinois de Tonkin", signed Tissot, 25-04-1937, in: VNNA 1, Files of the Resident Superior of Tonkin (hereafter RST) 73758; Stoler1989.

13 "The association takes in métis children who are abandoned by their father or mother, and those who could be confined by their fathers. It could equally, for children abandoned by their father, and each time that the attitude of the mother justifies such measure, provoke vis-à-vis the latter, the divestment of parental power in the terms of the 24 July 1889 law, promulgated in Indochina on 8 August 1891". Article II, Section II, "Société de Protection des Enfants Métis Abandonnés, Statuts", 13-07-1906, in: VNNA 1, RST 5545.

Robin Orphanage, their goal was to use the colony's fatherless métis children to bolster the white French population.[14] This policy grew out of pronatalist concerns among French in the metropole and throughout the Empire. The mass carnage of World War One increased the fears of depopulation that had plagued French society since the 1870 Franco-Prussian War. Associating population size with military strength, the French public launched a pronatalist campaign to increase the French population in the metropole as well as some of the colonies.[15] In Indochina, the desire to increase the white French population led Métis Protection Society members and high-ranking colonial administrators to reimagine the children of French fathers and Vietnamese mothers as the colony's new white population.[16]

Because métis had ambiguous racial identities, protection societies developed a modernity project to influence métis children's identity by controlling their environment. Protection societies throughout Vietnam reasoned that fatherless métis children should be removed from the Vietnamese cultural environment—and their mothers—and raised in institutions where French was the dominant culture.[17] One of the rationales behind the removal of the fatherless métis children from their Vietnamese mothers was to prevent them from adopting the mothers' supposedly licentious lifestyle. So ubiquitous was this rhetoric about the Vietnamese prostitute-mother that it barely changed in 85 years (1890–1975) of protection society literature and indeed was popular in Vietnamese-speaking circles as well.[18] This was part of a French construction of Vietnamese female sexuality in which French colonists imagined Vietnamese women as exotic and hypersexual, although sometimes mannish. Under this construction, Vietnamese women were both the object of French heterosexual lust, as well as syphilitic seductresses who lured and infected French men and turned others to homosexuality and pedophilia.[19]

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14 Goucoch to GGI, 14-12-1943, in: VNNA 1, Files of the Governor General of Indochina (hereafter GGI) 10349; "Rapport sur l'activité de la Fondation Jules Brévié pendant l'année 1943", 1944, in: VNNA 1, GGI 482; Firpo 2010.

15 As Margaret Cook Andersen (2015) shows, populationists in the metropole encouraged white French families to settle in the colonies, as they believed that tropical environments increase fertility.

16 Firpo 2010.

17 'Programme for the Organization and Utilization of Eurasians in Indochina', in: VNNA 1, GGI 89.

18 Firpo 2016:163; Vũ Trọng Phụng 2003.

19 For example, in his 1937 study of venereal disease treatment, Vũ Trọng Phụng (2004:129–30) classifies mothers of métis children among the ranks of common prostitutes. Likewise, he discusses Vietnamese mothers of métis in terms of making it a profession to marry westerners in order to make a living (Vũ Trọng Phụng 2003; Proschan 2002:438).

As per modernist thinking, protection societies raised the young métis in specially controlled environments such as the René Robin Orphanage at the center of the scandal that opened this chapter. Like other métis orphanages at this time, the René Robin Orphanage isolated its wards from their mothers and Vietnamese society and proceeded to raise them in an exclusively French environment, requiring them to speak French language, wear French clothing, eat French food, and associate with French people. The belief was that children of dual racial heritage were teetering on a dangerous edge of identities but could become French if raised in the proper cultural environment. It was this perceived racial ambiguity and malleability that led Dr Quenardel and the priests to understand the boys as redeemable with proper guidance.

Age

In the early twentieth century, children were believed to have malleable moral structures and mutable characters. If raised under proper conditions, the modernist belief went, children would grow up to be upstanding citizens; however, if improperly reared, they risked becoming depraved adults or even criminals.[20] This belief in the malleability of character during childhood was a major driving force behind colonial policies towards fatherless métis children. Authorities believed that, if removed from the Vietnamese environment before reaching adolescence and raised in a French cultural and linguistic environment like the René Robin Orphanage, fatherless métis children could be transformed into Frenchmen and thereby prevented from engaging in prostitution or rebelling against the colonial government.[21] Otherwise, they would become irredeemably Vietnamese. At the time of the incident at the René Robin Orphanage, colonial officials were directing authorities to remove children from their mothers as early as possible, preferably as soon as they had finished nursing.[22] When mothers refused, the protection societies took the children by force.[23] Indeed, the case of child removals was not unique to colonial Indochina. In the early twentieth century, the American, Canadian, and Australian

20 Surkis 2006.

21 Resident Superior of Cambodia to GGI, 24-07-1921, in: Centre des Archives d'Outre-Mer, Aix-en-Provence (hereafter CAOM), GGI 15298.

22 Le Lieutenant Colonel Belloc to L'Inspecteur du Travail et de la Prévoyance Sociale au Tonkin, 14-11-1942, in: VNNA 1, GGI 89; "Notes au Sujet du Problème des Eurasiens par RP Dupont, Directeur de l'Orphelinat R. Robin", [1942], in: VNNA 1, GGI 89.

23 Belloc to M. le Président de Fondation Jules Brevié, 14-05-1940, in: VNNA 1, GGI 10338.

governments had similar modernizing projects to remove indigenous children from their mothers and educate the children in the colonizing culture.[24]

Influencing young children was a way to control the future politics of the colony. French officials believed that, if socialized in French language and culture, fatherless métis children would grow up to be loyal to the colonial government. As per the metropolitan fascist ideology of the 1940s, the colonial state cultivated a spirit of patriotism among the colony's French and indigenous youth.[25] Indeed, the colonial state faced stiff competition in its quest to win over Indochina's youth. The Japanese military created rival paramilitary youth organizations in Cochinchina to encourage boys to develop loyalties to Japan.[26] Nationalist and anticolonial Vietnamese likewise mined the nation's youth as a political resource.

A corollary to the theory about the malleability of children's minds and characters was that this malleability came to an abrupt end at the "threshold of life" (*le seuil de la vie*), meaning adolescence. Adolescence, according to French understandings of child development, was a dangerous time when "the equilibrium between reason and base or animal desires is even more fragile than in the young child".[27] Colonial authorities warned there was a "danger" that, if not removed from indigenous elements and allowed to "take their rightful place" before they reached adolescence, the colony's population of fatherless métis could rebel. To stave off the political threat posed by fatherless métis, protection society officials concluded: "we must make the métis part of our civilization".[28] Those métis children who had passed through adolescence were deemed too old to be formed into French men and, even if the parents or children themselves requested aid, the protection societies rejected them.[29]

Colonial ideas about adolescent development were likewise reflected in the way that authorities understood and dealt with the sexual crisis at the René Robin Orphanage. The boys' sexual activities were, they insisted, neither innocent nor accidental. From the notes the priest found, it was clear that the supposed crimes were premeditated; and the secretive nature of the late-night *rendez-vous* showed that the boys knew what they were doing was considered wrong and needed to remain secret. Dr Quenardel assumed that the elder boys were already on the road to perversion and criminality. He ordered strict

24 See for example, Jacobs 2009; Edwards and Read 1989.

25 Raffin 2005:4–13.

26 Raffin 2005:195.

27 Surkis *2006*:39.

28 "Note sur la Société d'assistance aux enfants franco-indochinois de Tonkin", signed Tissot, 25-04-1937, in: VNNA 1, RST 73758.

29 For the 1938 case of AK, see VNNA 1, MHN 5900.

surveillance of the adolescent boys so as to prevent—or catch—any further infractions, and any subsequent infractions would be met with "merciless expulsion". Meanwhile, the doctor ordered the orphanage to separate the wards to protect the younger boys from the "unhealthy manoeuvres" of the pubescent boys.

Those involved in the incident at the René Robin Orphanage were all under 14 years old and thus still in the midst of the adolescent phase of development.[30] Had the wards been older, orphanage authorities likely would have deemed them inverts, expelled them from the orphanage, left them to fend for themselves with no resources and far from their mothers, and possibly registered them with the colonial police. While Dr Quenardel ordered a harsh penalty of sequestration, strict surveillance, and no allowance for repeat offences for the pubescent wards, he allowed the adolescent and the younger wards to have a second chance because he believed that, with the proper moral education, they could be reformed.

Sexuality

Most disturbing for Dr Quenardel and the priests in charge of the orphanage was evidence that the wards had masturbated and engaged in homosexual activity. These events bothered the priests and the doctor due to a number of factors: the cultural and demographic importance placed on male sexuality; their understanding of childhood as a time of 'innocence' from sexuality; and their fears of homosexuality, which the doctor and priests understood to be a "moral disease which attacks the moral code".[31] The occurrence of masturbation and homosexuality at the René Robin Orphanage was understood as a crisis because childhood was "the ground upon which both the normative and the deviant get produced".[32]

In the interwar years, male sexuality was directly connected to the health of the nation. After the 1871 French loss of the Franco-Prussian war, French politicians and intellectuals reasoned that France's loss was due to the country's low birth rate relative to the other countries in Europe. The high mortality rates of World War One further exacerbated French anxieties about depopulation. Within the context of the early twentieth-century

30 Sexologist Nguyễn An Nhân (1932:20) found in his research that Vietnamese boys experienced puberty from 16–18 years old.

31 "Report", illegible signature, 11-03-1943, in: VNNA 1, MH 5900.

32 Egan and Hawkes 2008.

pro-natalist movement, discourse on sex and reproduction was understood in term of the health and strength of the nation.[33] Male sexuality was understood as "simultaneously productive and disruptive".[34] If properly expressed, it could be a source for social progress; if improperly expressed it could be deviant and antisocial. As a result, "masculinity, like citizenship itself, required schooling".[35]

The priests and Dr Quenardel were concerned because, like their counterparts in Europe, they understood sexuality as belonging exclusively to the adult realm; children were expected to be asexual. Sexuality was also understood in moral terms: children were described as innocent because they were not yet sexual and those who had sex were, by contrast, "guilty".[36] The late nineteenth century saw a 'pedagogization' of childhood sexuality: as childhood sexuality could be dangerous, parents, teachers, doctors and other adults took responsibility for educating children with the necessary inhibitions to hide their sexual potential.[37] At the turn of the century, Sigmund Freud introduced the idea that childhood sexuality was normal, albeit latent. According to Freud, children were conditioned to develop inhibitions until the onset of puberty, at which point, sexual impulses appeared.[38]

Until the late nineteenth century, France and other European societies viewed masturbation not just as a vice but as a source of innumerable health problems, including life threatening disease and premature death. Although advances in medicine revealed that masturbation was not the cause of life-threatening diseases, controversy over the issue would persist into the first half of the twentieth century.[39] In the late nineteenth century, teachers and doctors "combatted children's onanism like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated".[40] In extreme cases, doctors prescribed circumcision or cliterectomy to reduce children's masturbatory urges. Although Freud normalized childhood sexuality, he nonetheless warned that excessive masturbation could be debilitating and cause neurasthenia.[41]

33 Nye 1984:72.
34 Surkis 2006:13.
35 Surkis 2006:15.
36 Foucault 1980:42; Fishman 1982.
37 Foucault 1980:104.
38 Freud 1948:39–41.
39 Medical developments in the late nineteenth century led to a demographic shift in which fewer people died in their young adult years, years when they were thought to masturbate the most (Laqueur 2003:363–4).
40 Foucault 1980:42.
41 Freud 1948:39–41.

For its part, Vietnamese society of the interwar years had varied views on masturbation. A sex manual published in 1932 warned readers of various illnesses caused by masturbation, including chronic illness, damage to sexual organs, cerebrospinal damage, and spermatorrhoea, which, according to the Vietnamese medical system, interfered with the flow of body energy (*chi*) to the kidneys.[42] Peter Zinoman has shown that by the 1930s, as the Vietnamese public became aware of Freudian theory, masturbation was no longer viewed as a potential cause of death.[43]

Like masturbation, homosexuality was regarded as dangerous and deviant by colonial officials; at the time of the 'moral crisis' at the René Robin Orphanage in 1943, homosexual acts had recently become recriminalized under Vichy law. France's long period of decriminalization (from 1791 to 1942) had by no means been reflective of public tolerance towards homosexuality.[44] With the other countries of Europe prosecuting homosexual activity throughout the nineteenth century, Paris had developed a reputation for tolerance, but towns outside the capital could hardly take credit for such attitudes. As for members of the French medical community, they understood homosexual acts as automatic evidence of a state of perversion that required ongoing regulation.[45]

After World War One, the French public came to associate homosexuality not only with social disease and immorality but also with perceived weaknesses in the nation, linking it to low birth rates. Given the link that metropolitan pronatalists made between birthrate and military strength, it followed that homosexuals were at least partly to blame for France's loss. Homosexuality was seen as "incompatible with manliness", thus inhibiting not only male fertility but also the development of the French military.[46] In the face of the economic crisis of the 1930s and the rise of fascist movements throughout Europe, French opinion regarded homosexuality as emblematic of the decadence and cultural decline of the 1920s. As a result, "inversion" was regarded as a "national cancer".[47]

42 Nguyễn An Nhân 1932:24.

43 Zinoman 2013:140, 145.

44 During the French Revolution, among the many changes to French law enacted by revolutionaries were the secularization of law and the codification of liberal principles. Under secularization, the legal code eliminated the category of crimes of superstition, including witchcraft, blasphemy, heresy, and sodomy among others. The liberal principles that guided Republican law required victims for acts considered crimes. Consensual homosexuality had no victim and thus could not be considered a crime (Gunther 2009:1–24).

45 Aldrich 1982:4; Foucault 1980:43.

46 Nye 1992:186–7.

47 Tamagne 2006:388–90.

It is important to note that ideas about homosexuality as a socially destructive perversion were not prevalent in Vietnamese writings of the colonial period. Richard Tran argues that Vietnamese society, which never adopted Freudian understandings of homosexuality as a pathology or perversion, had a more fluid understanding of gender and sexuality. Tran found, instead, that Vietnamese society understood homosexuality as an act rather than an identity. Moreover, he found evidence in the mainstream Vietnamese press of accepting attitudes towards same-sex romance.[48]

Homosexuality was banned in the occupied zone of France after the 1940 Nazi invasion, and those accused of homosexual acts were sent to concentration camps along with Jews and other groups targeted by the Nazi regime. Just six months before Dr Quenardel treated the boys at the René Robin Orphanage, the Vichy government enacted Article 334 of the law of 6 August 1942, raising the age of consent for participation in homosexual activity from 11 years old to 25 years old. Offenders met a prison sentence of six months to three years and a heavy fine.[49] Vietnamese society, for its part, began to adopt more rigid notions of gender and sexuality. Under the Vichy regime, cross-dressing and homosexuality were no longer considered acceptable.[50]

Considering that public opinion and the law were firmly against the wards at the René Robin Orphanage, Dr Quenardel's approach to dealing with the boys departed from the norm. Although the doctor's characterization of the incident as "unhealthy manoeuvres", "indecent affections", and a "moral disease"[51] indicates that he considered the incident deeply problematic, he departed from his colleagues in the metropole in two ways. However contemptuous he was of homosexuality, he never characterized the young boys' homosexual deeds as crimes as per the 1942 law that set the age of consent to 21 years old. Secondly, Quenardel did not see the boys' acts as evidence of a fixed homosexual identity; instead, he explained the incident as wards having "practiced homosexuality or tried it, more or less", indicating that he understood the incident to be mere acts of sexual experimentation.[52] In this regard, he may have been influenced by the relatively tolerant attitudes of the Vietnamese press and public.

Quenardel's understanding of the events at the René Robin Orphanage was all the more remarkable considering the ways in which most French colonists viewed male Vietnamese sexuality. The predominant image that

48 Tran 2011:vii, 58–60, 70.
49 Aldrich 1982:5.
50 Tran 2011:69.
51 "Report", illegible signature, 11-03-1943, in: VNNA 1, MH 5900.
52 "Report", illegible signature, 11-03-1943, in: VNNA 1, MH 5900.

French colonists constructed of Vietnamese male sexuality was at once desexualized (effeminate and emasculated) and hypersexualized (licentious and homosexual).[53] They drew from French literary representations of men as hermaphrodites (male actors playing female roles), palace eunuchs, colonial servant 'boys', and *soldats mamzelles*—effeminate long-haired soldiers of the colonial army. [54]

The Cure

Instead of simply reporting the boys as per the law, the doctor took a nuanced approach to solving what he believed to be a problem. The cure was based on modernist understandings of ambiguous bodies. He began by interviewing the boys at length until he convinced them to confess to having participated in homosexual activity.[55] The doctor then suggested 'curing' the boys with an approach that privileged the less problematic side of each of their multiple ambiguous identities. The young charges were treated as children, not adults; as French, not Vietnamese; and as young people experimenting with homosexual acts rather than as homosexuals.

Authorities in the René Robin Orphanage had long attempted to manage the sexuality of the young boys, who had enjoyed no privacy even before being accused of acts of sexual experimentation. Wards had had to resort to passing notes to arrange secret *rendez-vous* to explore their sexuality and pursue romantic relationships. The sleeping quarters of the René Robin Orphanage, like other twentieth-century orphanages around the world, were large open spaces with beds lined up in rows. This design not only saved space and money but also enabled authorities to keep an eye on wards while reminding them—in the panopticon phenomenon described by Michel Foucault[56]—that they were being watched around the clock. At orphanages for métisse girls, authorities tracked girls' reproductive cycles and played a hand in arranging '*beaux marriages*'—marriages that fit the social, economic, and racial expectations the protection societies had for wards. In cases where female wards failed to find a spouse before aging out of the orphanage system, the métis protection societies placed them in *Foyers des Femmes*, residences designed to prevent

53 Proschan 2002:436, 438.

54 Proschan 2002:438.

55 Confessions, as Foucault (1980:60–1) shows, were a way of making sexuality be understood in terms of normalcy and pathology.

56 Foucault 1977:204–5.

unmarried women from engaging in premarital sex or resorting to prostitution to pay their rent.[57] This attempt to control métis wards' sexuality speaks to a larger trend of regulating the sex lives of patients in institutions. As Claire Edington has shown, French colonial authorities attempted to regulate the sex lives of patients in psychiatric institutions by probing into their personal lives and prescribing disciplinary measures, including abstinence and labour, to mitigate patients' virility.[58]

Dr Quenardel directed orphanage administrators to protect children from their own sexuality because sexualized children were considered a risk to others as well as themselves.[59] Dr Quenardel separated the boys from one another, using age as a gauge of "guilt". He directed administrators to monitor children as they slept in order to prevent masturbation. Yet, discussions of age and sexuality were loaded with the subtext of other social concerns. As Danielle Egan writes, the need to protect children from sexuality was a "smokescreen for other social interventions that often go far beyond the bodies and pleasures of children themselves".[60] For example, protection societies claimed to protect métis from what French authorities believed was the hypersexualized lifestyle of their Vietnamese mothers. This claim justified removing fatherless métis from their mothers and the Vietnamese cultural milieu.

Dr Quenardel's 'cure' for the sexual activities of the boys at the René Robin Orphanage focused on their bodies. His approach was to discipline their bodies to manage their sexuality and morality. This speaks to Foucault's argument that states use bodies as a site of social control.[61] Similarly, as Aihwa Ong and Michael Peletz have shown, both colonial and post-colonial Southeast Asian states used bodily discipline to enforce gender norms.[62] Among other things, Dr. Quenardel suggested that the boys follow a rigorous exercise regimen. Since the nineteenth century in Europe, athletics had been seen as a solution to the problem of childhood sexuality. The rise in modern sports and gymnastics during this period was part of an effort to curb masturbatory impulses among children.[63] In the early twentieth century, French society had linked the condition of the physical body of its citizens with the health of the nation. Sport was thus no less than a solution for national revival.[64]

57 *Hommes heureux* 1937.
58 Edington 2013:217–24.
59 Egan and Hawkes 2008.
60 Egan and Hawkes 2008.
61 Foucault 1977.
62 Ong and Peletz 1995:6.
63 Fishman 1982:278.
64 Nye 1984:310–29.

During the Vichy years, male strength, muscularity, and athletic ability became essential to the image of normative modern masculinity.[65] Maurice Ducoroy, the head of the Indochina General Commissariat for Physical Education, Sports, and Youth, led a youth-based movement that aimed for "unity and health in order to serve one's country".[66] These ideas were picked up in the Vietnamese newspaper, *Thanh Niên Đông Pháp* (The Youth of East France, or Indochina Youth),[67] which regularly contrasted heavily stylized images of muscular Vietnamese athletes playing French sports such as rowing and soccer with stylized images of weak and effeminate Vietnamese mandarins. The message was that a strong body was part and parcel of modernity.[68]

Dr Quenardel also suggested controlling the boys' activities through a vegetarian, low-salt diet. Food was an important part of life at the orphanages, with administrators restricting wards to French meals except in time of economic crisis.[69] French colonists living in Indochina crafted an identity around food. Although metropolitan French ate many of the same foods as Vietnamese—rice being one such example—the French population in the colony tended to shun such foods so as to disassociate themselves from their indigenous counterparts.[70] French children were forbidden to eat Vietnamese food for reasons of "hygiene".[71] French administrators aimed to feed wards diets of only French food in order to foster a sense of French identity.

Dr Quenardel's recommendations of a low-salt, vegetarian diet were likely influenced by several factors. In the late nineteenth century, a small vegetarian movement had developed in France, motivated by environmentalism, poverty reduction, and a desire to "restore the health of the nation".[72] One of the founders had been influenced by Buddhist vegetarians during his time in Burma.[73] Although vegetarianism never became a movement

65 Tumblety 2012.

66 Đinh Xuân Lâm 2004:433.

67 In February 1944, *Thể Thao Đông Dương* changed its name to *Thanh Niên Đông Pháp.* While *Thanh Niên Đông Pháp* could be translated as Indochina Youth, it is important to note that the editors consciously changed the term from Đông Dương (Indochina) to Đông Pháp (literally, east France and possibly a shortened version of Đông Dương Thuộc Pháp, meaning colonial Indochina). Đông Pháp connotes loyalty and nationalist sentiment towards France. This paper lasted through 8 March 1945.

68 *Vệ sanh* 1945; *Trong vườn* 1944; *Cho được* 1944.

69 To save money during the Great Depression they had to feed wards Vietnamese food for 3 to 5 meals per week.

70 Peters 2011:149–80.

71 Ha 2014:224.

72 Crossley 2005:241; Ouédraogo 2000.

73 Ouédraogo 2000:206.

among Indochina's French population, French nutritionists often recommended reducing meat consumption in the colonial tropics.[74] More specifically, a bland vegetarian diet was believed among both eastern and western health practitioners to curb sexual appetites. The US-based Seventh Day Adventist organization introduced to the world Reverend Sylvester Graham's Graham crackers and Dr John Harvey Kellogg's corn flakes, both of which were promoted as "health foods" to curb adolescents' masturbatory urges.[75] The Vietnamese traditional Buddhist system of belief likewise taught that food could be used to curb sexual appetites. According to this system, eating *mặn* (meat and salty food) heats the blood, thereby exciting the passions, while eating spices leads to hot tempers. Vegetarian, bland, low-salt diets would not only promote virtue generally but would calm one's disposition, including one's sexual urges.[76]

A Post-Colonial Postscript

Dr Quenardel's approach to managing the mixed-race bodies and the French modernist project to influence their ambiguous identities continued after decolonization. After the 1954 Geneva Agreements ended French colonial rule in Vietnam, the new Saigon-based Republic of Vietnam government followed the French model for citizenship. Like its colonial predecessor, the Saigon government avoided making a separate juridical class for métis. Under the terms of the 1955 Franco-Vietnamese Convention on citizenship, unless recognized by their fathers, métis minors inherited their mothers' Vietnamese citizenship. Yet the Vietnamese policy differed from that of its colonial predecessor in that it allowed for those métis who inherited their fathers' citizenship to, upon passing through adolescence into adulthood, choose Vietnamese citizenship.[77]

Métis protection societies continued to operate in Vietnam for 26 years after decolonization. The Fédération des Oeuvres de l'Enfance Française de l'Indochine (FOEFI), founded in 1946, was the last iteration of the métis protection societies. After decolonization, the FOEFI maintained the same colonial-era administrators to lead its programmes. The FOEFI operated like a non-governmental aid organization: it was recognized and supported by the French government and had offices in Paris and Saigon.

74 Peters 2011:149–80.

75 Money 1985.

76 Phụng Kiểu Võ 1932:4–8; Nõ Thĩch 1934.

77 "Convention sur la Nationalité" reprinted in *Fédération des Oeuvres* 1956.

After independence, the FOEFI sent its métis charges, including the wards of the René Robin Orphanage,[78] to France, where they were raised in institutions run by the protection society. In a complicated history, the FOEFI continued to search the South Vietnamese countryside for métis children of French men who left them behind with their Vietnamese mothers—and without access to a French cultural upbringing. The FOEFI obtained custody of them and raised them in institutions in Saigon before sending them to institutions in France.[79]

The post-colonial FOEFI institutions in both France and Saigon continued to focus on métis bodies as a way of influencing their character and forming them into modern citizens. In Saigon, the FOEFI separated wards from the Vietnamese cultural environment and raised them in institutions where they were prescribed strict exercise regimes and a diet of French food. In France, the FOEFI continued to prescribe a regime of rigorous exercise and track female wards' menstrual cycles.[80] The métis protection programme for Franco-Vietnamese children ended in 1975, when the communist forces of the north defeated the southern Republic of Vietnam, and the country was unified under the Socialist Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The story of Dr Quenardel's solution reflected ideas about body culture and modernist projects to influence ambiguous identities, ideas that continued long after decolonization, through 1975. Concerned about the ambiguous nature of métis identities, métis protection societies continued to institutionalize Franco-Vietnamese children and use techniques of influencing their bodies to influence their identities.

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78 In 1946, wards of the René Robin Orphanage became charges of the FOEFI.
79 Firpo 2016.
80 *Fédération des Oeuvres* 1961.

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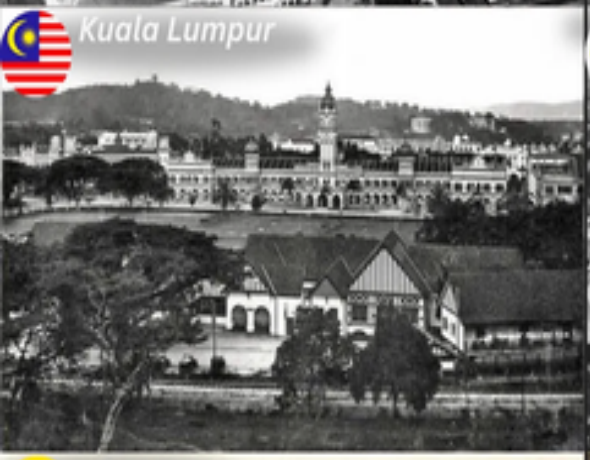
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